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April 20th 1922
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GALDAN KHAN was preparing to write his name upon the annals of Central Asia. A forest of his spears streamed toward the passes of the Pamirs. From the heights a Christian warrior faced them with the wide plains of Tartary behind him—and the grave of his brother at his feet. "THE WOLF-CHASER," a complete novelette by Harold Lamb in the next issue.

CRUISING the Indian Ocean in company with the drunken pirate *Avary;* a historical romance of eighteenth-century buccaneering is the complete novelette in the next issue. "PLUNDER," by J. Allan Dunn.

AVIATION in the hills of West Virginia. The Secret Service calls upon the Army Air Force for aid in suppressing a nation-wide criminal organization. "DIRECT METHODS," a complete novelette by Thomson Burtis in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

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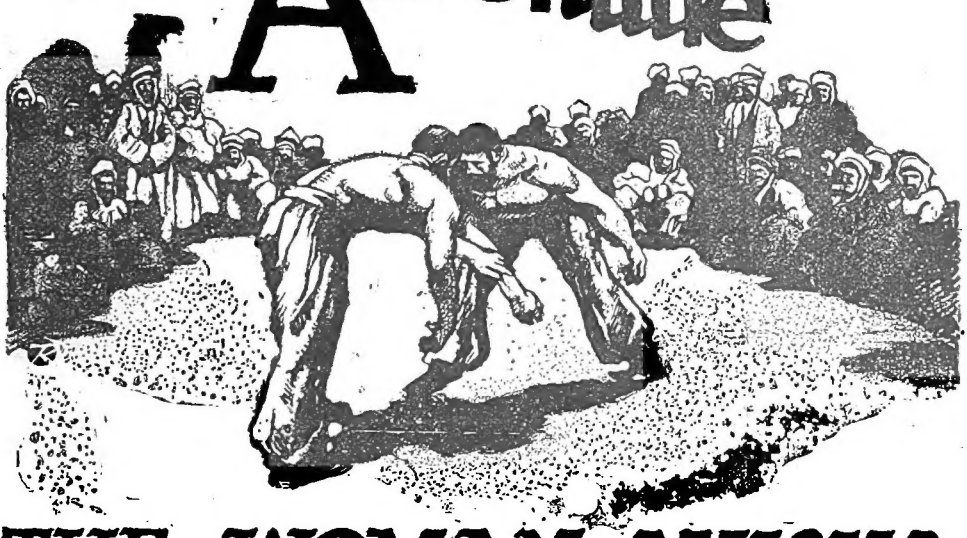

THE WOMAN AYISHA

A Complete Novel by TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "The Iblis at Ludd," "The Lion of Petra," etc.

CHAPTER I

"Ali, I say I go with him!"

CONSIDER the situation for a moment first. There were twenty of us—seventeen Arabs, Narayan Singh the Sikh, myself, and Grim. We were in Petra over-Jordan, which was no-man's land until Ali Higg, self-styled Lion of Petra, friend of the Prophet of Islam, Lord of the Limits of the Desert and Lord of the Waters—Ali Higg the Terrible, swooped into it from Arabia, and with the aid of Jael, his European wife, established himself there as a thorn in the flank of Palestine.

You couldn't choose a better place to be a thorn in. Impregnable without long-range artillery; inaccessible except by aeroplanes, if once the Valley of Moses leading into it through a twelve-foot gap were blocked; furnished with enough half-ruined graves and temples for accommodation purposes; close enough to Palestine for sudden raids, and surrounded by dry desert over which no mandatory power would think of sending an army if that could possibly be helped, Petra is the perfect outlaw's paradise—a paradise of opal set in savage mountains.

As for ourselves, you could hardly call us an official expedition, nor even exactly authorized, for Grim enjoyed a free hand, subject to the definite proviso that he would be promptly disowned by the Palestine authorities if trouble came of it. The British, having heard from the tax-payer, did not want to send an army against Ali Higg, besides which they had no mandate yet for the trans-Jordan country, as Ali Higg and all the Bedouins were well aware.

An American, even though commissioned in the British army, can get away with things no Britisher would dare attempt because, of course, the authorities would have to stand behind a Britisher, whereas Americans are all born crazy and act without authority, and everybody knows it, and there you are, old top; so what's the use?

And Grim by using brains and information, which is a combination nobody can

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beat, had cornered Ali Higg, as I told in the last story. One hundred and forty of Ali's men, under a veteran named Ibrahim ben Ah, were resting their camels miles away in an oasis. The remaining forty and odd were camped in another direction.

Jael, Ali Higg's wife, after being made prisoner, had grudgingly agreed to help Grim tame her lord and master; and what with drenching him thoroughly, lancing his boils and catching him at an all-around disadvantage, we had forced him to give a hostage for good behavior in the shape of a deposit of fifty thousand pounds lying in his wife's name in the Bank of Egypt.

So far, good; but there were complications. In the first place, that document was not worth a plugged piastre until safely under lock and key in Jerusalem; for Ali Higg would surely steal it back if he could. The money had been paid into the bank in gold, mainly half-sovereigns that were earned by Arab troops in the war against the Turks. The man who could squeeze all that money out of fighting Bedouins was unlikely to lose his grip on it, even for the three-year term of the agreement, if force or chicanery should provide him an alternative. If those troops of his should suddenly return, for instance, not only the agreement but our lives would be at stake.

The easiest course would have been to scoot out of Petra and head for Palestine, avoiding that oasis where the "army" waited. But Grim had made a promise, which prevented that. In return for Ali Higg's pledge and in the general interest of peace he had undertaken to deal with a sheikh at Abu Lissan, farther south, who with eight hundred men proposed to come and "eat up" the terrible Ali and his scant ten score.

While on our way southward there would be nothing to prevent Ali Higg from swooping on us treacherously from behind; but in dealing with people who might perhaps break faith there is nothing nearly so important as observing your own promises.

Nor was that all. Our opportunity to visit Petra, give the slip to Ali Higg's men, capture his head wife and corner the gentleman himself had come through Ayisha, his second wife, whom Grim had found making purchases in Hebron and who welcomed our escort on her way home across the desert. On the way she had fallen in love with Grim after the desperately swift fashion of the country. Thinking to poison Ali Higg, she had given him croton oil, which we provided. It served our purpose famously, but rather naturally maddened the fierce polygamist, who divorced her on the spot. So we had Ayisha on our hands, for we couldn't decently leave her to take the consequences.

When I was a boy at school I once borrowed from another boy a dime manual entitled "What To Do with a Dead Policeman." But that problem—solved, I remember, clumsily—was a very simple one compared to what we had to face.

Ayisha was a beautiful young woman, wholly bereft of convention in the Western sense, and totally resolved to win Grim for her own or know the reason why. Our rank and file, excepting Narayan Singh and myself, were all profound polygamists from El-Kalil, thieves by profession and conviction, and inclined to treat Ayisha's love affair as a prodigious joke; which, of course, it was, but for the infernal danger.

In fact, the whole situation was a joke, if you could only bring yourself to look at it in that way. What else could you call the intention of twenty men (not one an Englishman) cut off from supplies and support, to interfere between the warring tribes of North Arabia and breed peace in the process where none had ever been since history was written?

As I sat with my back against the wall of Ali Higg's cave overlooking the gorge of the City of Ghosts (as they call Petra) I tried to figure on our chances, but could meld nothing. Not that we weren't a pretty resourceful crew of a sort, and fit to fight, perhaps, three times our number; but the odds seemed overwhelming in that land where, as they say, "in the desert all men are enemies."

There wasn't one of us who could not mount his camel on the run, with a rifle in one hand, and our camels were the finest beasts that ever swung leg out of Syria. There was nothing about desert work that you could teach Grim or any of our seventeen Arabs. Narayan Singh was a Sikh in a thousand—a bold soldier of the old school, who should have been born a hundred years ago. As for myself, although comparatively new to Arabs and Arabia, I have prospected and hunted big game for a living up and down the length of Africa; and if diplomacy

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is not my long suit, I can endure; and physical strength has advantages.

But I laughed to myself as I sat there and looked at Grim, wondering at the freak of fortune that had thrown us together. True, I have chosen to spend my life looking for adventure where it grows; but a man likes to pile up a few dollars against old age and I have generally reckoned up the prospects in advance.

There was no money to be made in Grim's company. It didn't matter, as it happened, for I have not had more than my share of disappointment and need never starve again as long as the U. S. keeps a Government in being. But middle-aged dogs don't learn new tricks too easily, and I have known less surprizing things than to find myself risking a sun-burned neck behind a whole-souled altruist without the remotest possibility of making a profit.

But you couldn't resist Grim. The man is like a lodestone, if you have the iron of adventure in you. I could take two of him, one in each hand, and shake them as a dog does rats; for though he is tall he is lightly framed, whereas the muscle stands on me in lumps. But when it comes to a call for those qualities that have always seemed to me man's finest, he can leave me standing still.

Mind you, I yield to no man in determination to live so according to the rules, as I understand them, that I can afford to look any man in the eye and tell him to go to —— if I see fit. But that is one thing—comfortable in its way, and good for friendship. Genius is another. Grim has genius, besides a flair for leaving this old battered world a wee mite better than he found it.

I never heard him preach. Intimate friend of mine though he now is, I have hardly ever heard him discuss his principles. But I did hear him tell Jael Higg, by way of convincing her that her only possible course was to help him tame her ambitious lord if she hoped to escape imprisonment and deportation, that his one asset is understanding of Arabs and Arabia; that he is —— bent, as he put it, on doing his bit in the world; and that his notion of a good big bit is to help Arabia to independence by preventing brigandage and civil war.

He clings to his American citizenship as some men stick to religion. The British made him a major on those terms because they needed him, and he accepted because it seemed the best way to carry on what he had in view. He is punctiliously loyal to the crowd whose uniform he wears occasionally, yet I never knew a man more outspoken to his paymasters whenever he disagrees with them, nor any one who took more liberties with orders.

His one annoying quality is that of keeping his thoughts to himself, hardly ever discussing a plan until it is perfect in his own mind and then telling you, perhaps, not more than half of it; after which he springs the rest on you as a surprize. But if you want to be friends with any man on earth you'll find there's something or other to put up with.

We all have our hobbies, even those who imagine they have none and boast of it. Having traveled widely I have had to make mine portable, and the two things that have increasingly obsessed me are the ancient history of whatever land I happen to be in, and the study of men's faces.

I had time to study two now—Grim's and Ali Higg's, for they were sitting face to face in the middle of the cave, Grim stooping from the shoulders as he squatted Arab fashion in exactly the same way that the robber chieftain did.

You would never have guessed that Grim wasn't an Arab, born in that part of Arabia. Unless in the secret, you would never have believed the two were not blood-brothers—possibly even twins. Seen in the comparative gloom of the cave they resembled a man facing his reflection.

Except for the bandages on Ali Higg's neck they were dressed alike, and the only difference noticeable at the first glance was the color of their eyes: Ali Higg's were brown and blood-shot; Grim's were keen and baffling—somewhere in the region of blue-gray. I have looked straight into them and not been able to tell their color.

Now the puzzling thing was this: That whereas every line of Grim's face made for strength, independence, honesty and all those other qualities that you recognize in a man at the first glance and like immediately, almost identical features made a rogue of Ali Higg. I believe you could have taken a pair of calipers and measured them without finding enough difference to split a hair about.

Both were clean-shaven, although Ali Higg's sparse whiskers had about two days' growth, which darkened and slightly changed the outline of his face. Both had

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that kind of chin with the suggestion of a cleft in it that usually goes along with a deep understanding of human nature.

Each man's eyes were large and seated rather deep. Each had a calm forehead, not much wrinkled, and their noses might have been cast from one mold—good, big noses, delicately curved along the bridge, with nostrils of the shape supposed to show good breeding.

They were the same height, and I don't believe either man weighed more than a hundred and forty pounds. I weigh nearly a hundred more than either of them. So does Narayan Singh.

Being dressed as an Indian Moslem from Lahore, with a great brown Bedouin cloak thrown over all, with my head showing shaved under the turban and a week's growth of nearly black beard sprouting, my disguise was pretty nearly perfect; but I dare bet that if a stranger could have entered that cave suddenly, he would have recognized Grim without hesitation as the man to reckon with; Ali Higg as the villain of the piece; Narayan Singh as a somewhat quarrelsome though loyal subordinate, and me as the looker-on.

It's difficult to see yourself as others might, but I expect that air of more or less detachment is hard to disguise when you have no real stake in a venture, except, of course, your life—something we most of us risk more casually than our money.

ALI HIGG watched us with similar curiosity, glancing from one to the other furtively, whereas Grim never shifted his gaze, but eyed the bandit steadily. It is one of the privileges of the East to sit as long as you want to and say nothing; outside on the ledge sat our old friend, Ali Baba with his sixteen sons and grandsons, overlooking the valley like vultures in a row; and nothing was likely to escape their eagle eyes, well fed though they were, and perhaps sleepy after gorging the bandit's rice and mutton. We had no need to seem in a hurry, and it was Ali Higg at last who spoke first.

"O Jimgrim, you have promised you will deal with that dog Hassan Saoud of Abu Lissan."

"True, O Lion of Petra."

"Then either you made that promise in order to trick me into signing an agreement, or else you are a madman! For how shall you, who have but nineteen men, get the better of Hassan Saoud, who styles himself the Avenger and has at least eight hundred?"

"Did I have the better of you?" Grim asked him.

"Father of ruses, yes! But you must give me back that agreement unless you keep your promise by smiting the Avenger. And how shall you do it?"

"Have I smitten you?" asked Grim.

The robber put some oily seeds into his mouth and chewed the cud on that for several minutes.

"But unless he is destroyed the Avenger will come and make war on me. If he wins, he will slay me and make some of my men prisoners, adding them to the force he has already.

"Thus you will have a more difficult man to deal with than I have been. Whereas I have only raided into Palestine a dozen times, he will make a holy war and plunder Jerusalem itself. So you must smite him or return me that agreement."

Grim laughed.

"You'd better help me then! If I fail, you'll suffer sooner than any one."

"Uh-uh!" the robber grunted. "Here in Petra I might defeat him, for the pass is narrow and a woman is the equal of a man.* Out in the open I can not prevail against his numbers."

It was Grim's turn to sit silent. I was growing used to his masked changes of expression and did not doubt he knew what he was going to say; but I believe he turns over a sentence in his mind a dozen times before he uses it, on occasions when most men would seek to make an impression by rhetoric.

"They say I look like you," he said at last.

"They speak truly. We might have had one mother. Therefore it is unseemly that you should force a written pledge from me! Give me back that paper I signed, and go in peace."

Grim ignored the suggestion.

"Are you known to this sheikh who calls himself the Avenger?" he asked.

"*Wallah!* Am I known to him? He took the title of Avenger on account of me, when he swore to spill my blood in the dust! In the war I let myself be captured by the

*Alluding to the women's historic custom of throwing down rocks from the cliffs on invaders' heads.

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British rather than fall into his hands, for in those days I was not yet ready to take the field against him.

"Am I known to him! *Bismillah!* It was my knife that made the scar across his cheek! Not only does he know and remember me, but every man of his who sees that scar remembers me!"

"Then the Avenger will think I am you?" suggested Grim.

"Aye, and torture you with crucifixion on a dung-heap among the flies, after you have been well beaten."

"And my men will be considered your men?" Grim went on.

"Surely, and tortured too."

Grim made another long pause, and Ali Higg smirked in the belief that he had found the weak place in Grim's courage. But he winced when Grim countered calmly.

"So whatever my men and I do will be credited to you?"

"Allah!"

"So that if I fail I shall have added to the wrath of the Avenger?"

"As a man who takes a little stone and adds it to a mountain!"

"You'd better help," said Grim.

"As God is my witness, I am afraid to go against Ben Saoud the Avenger," answered Ali Higg. "Besides, what can I do? You have sent away my men—some in this direction, some in that."

"It was you who sent them away," Grim retorted. "All I did was to postpone their return. Now I'll give you one last chance to use your men on a campaign. After this once, peace!"

"*Mashallah!* What shall I do with peace? How then shall I get new camels?"

"Breed them."

"How shall I get provisions?"

"Till the oases. Sow and reap."

"How shall I make my name feared?"

"Make it respected. Was not Solomon the wisest man? Did he make war? Rather he held the scales of justice evenly, and men looked up to him."

"But the prophet Mohammed came after Solomon, and was wiser. He made war."

"I tell you, Ali Higg," said Grim, "you've made the last raid you ever will with impunity. It's none of my business to ruin you. I'd sooner see you establish yourself as a strong chief—strong enough to keep the peace in these parts, and keeping it fairly. But as Allah is my witness, Ali Higg, if you don't mend your ways the British will come and end them for you. What is more, I'll take the field myself against you, and not quit until your bones are bleaching. You may call me friend or enemy, but choose now. Which is it to be?"

Ali Higg grew fidgety, and his eyes shifted again. I didn't see what Grim stood to score by extracting a promise of friendship from such an obvious rogue; but you never know what Grim is driving at until it suits him to make it clear.

"*Wallahi!* If I say I am your friend," the Lion of Petra answered presently, "what shall prevent you from going to Saoud the Avenger and saying you are his friend?"

"True! What shall prevent?" said Grim.

"And joining him against me? For all men love to take the stronger side."

Ali Higg called for his water-pipe, and a woman brought it already filled with tobacco. She lighted it for him, and he ordered her gruffly to get out. He was evidently feeling pleased with himself over that piece of subtle reasoning.

There was silence for several minutes, during which Grim produced a cigaret, and old Ali Baba, grandfather and captain of our gang of thieves, came to the mouth of the cave to make sure that all was well. He excused himself by asking leave to send four men to feed our camels, and thereafter sat down just around the corner of the wall, where he could listen.

"Do you realize," Grim asked at last, "that if I proposed to take sides against you I would simply take and kick you over this cliff now?"

"Allah! That is not how friends talk."

"Yet I haven't even disarmed you. Instead, my *hakim* here has lanced your boils and——"

"Aye! Leaving me too sore and weak to take the field against any one! I would bastinado such a *hakim* if he were mine."

He looked meaningly at me, but drew small satisfaction from it, for I laughed. I daresay my hand was a fraction heavy with the presentation razor that turned that trick. I can skin a dead lion rather neatly, but no college of surgeons ever gave me its parchment benediction.

"I don't wish you to take the field," said Grim.

"*Il hamdul illah!** What then?"

"I want your men."

*Thank God!

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At that the Lion of Petra swore a blue streak sixty seconds long of brimstone Arab blasphemy. There is no such language as Arabic to swear in. Not even the Missouri mule has kicked back at such scurrilous expletives. Ali Baba thrust his old wrinkled face around the corner and grinned.

"So that is the idea! So that is the foreign scheme! What son of sixty dogs imagines he can lead my men?"

"They might find themselves pretty soon without a leader otherwise," suggested Grim.

Ali Higg ceased smoking. Rage and tobacco and helplessness didn't seem to make a palatable mixture. To judge by his wandering eyes, one second he seemed to be making up his mind to dash past us in a bolt for liberty, the next he contemplated suicide in a duel to the death with Grim.

His left hand groped for his rifle behind him, but could not quite reach it without betraying what he intended. Narayan Singh rattled the butt of his own rifle on the cave floor, and I laid mine pretty ostentatiously across my knees. There was no need for Grim to feel disturbed, and he obviously didn't.

In fact, I think Grim was having a good time. I'm no fisherman myself, lacking that kind of patience and getting more enjoyment from the sports that call for strenuous exertion, but I've often seen on the face of some fellow angling for a big one pretty much the expression that Grim wore then. His lips were set in a firm smile, and his eyes shone.

"You will ask me for my wives presently," said Ali Higg with biting sarcasm.

"No, not all of them," Grim answered. "Only one."

"By the beard of the Prophet and my feet, what next! I have divorced Ayisha—you may have the baggage. Much good may she do you!"

"I witnessed the divorce," Grim answered, "so I did not count her as your honor's wife."

"What then?"

Now the Lion's anger began to weaken into fear as he guessed the drift of Grim's intention. You can't help feeling sorry for a tyrant in a corner as one phase after another of his helplessness dawns on him.

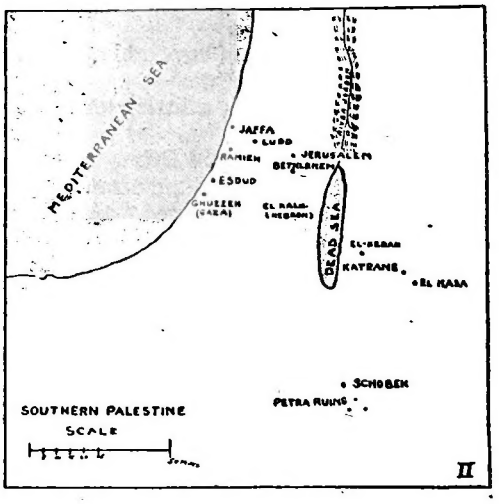
Grim eased the torture at once. A man like Ali Higg suffers more from beaten pride than we non-tyrants do from toothache.

"Never fear," he said; "I will not take Jael from you. I will either bring or send her back to you safely afterward, but she must come."

Ali Higg looked incredulous, enraged, suspicious, treacherous in turn, but made no answer. Another answered for him. There was an inner cave all hung with fine Bokhara embroideries, opening into that in which we sat. Jael herself stepped from the interior gloom, stood still for a minute facing us all, and laughed.

"Enough, Ali; I will go with him!"

When we had first met her she was dressed in man's clothes; but now, all jeweled with turquoise and amber, she wore the Bedouin woman's regalia, and it suited her style of beauty. The paleness of her freckled face was relieved by the veil that partly framed it, and although she must have been deathly



tired after the recent adventure she looked younger and not so hard-drawn. Jael was a perfect name for her—so perfect that you wondered whether it was really hers and not adopted; you could easily imagine her driving a tent-peg through the temples of a sleeping foe.

"Peace, woman!" growled Ali Higg.

"Peace, Ali? How can there be peace unless we let this Jimgrim have his way? Refuse him, and we must deal with Saoud the Avenger. Agree with him, and he may show us a way. If he fails, we shall be no worse off. I go with him."

"Peace, woman, I say! Be silent!"

"Very well. I will go in silence. It may

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be thus that we shall contrive peace. But I surely go with him!"

"Thou shalt not!"

"Ali, I say I go with him!"

CHAPTER II

"Once before she called herself his wife, on half the provocation."

THERE is a certain type of captious critic who annoys me horribly. He is usually a person who, by dint of vinegary unbelief in those solid underlying qualities of human character that decide most issues, has destroyed all his own power to make good the grand assertion in that favorite song of Grim's and mine—

I am the captain of my soul, I am the master of my fate!

Such a man will tell you that Grim hadn't done much yet. He will say—for I have heard him in a dozen places; on occasion he would be a merely jealous official superior of Grim's, but now and then, too, an after-dinner glutton by the fireside—that my friend's fortuitous resemblance to Ali Higg had got us safely into Petra, and the rest was sheer luck. The same man would doubtless consider it a piece of luck that the sun got up at dawn this morning and that the U. S. hasn't recently defaulted on its bonds. All right; but why not use the luck?

Grim had used his, and improved on it. Narayan Singh has certain qualities of romantic manhood that have made a soldier of him, along with an ineradicable fault that has preserved him from promotion and obscurity. It was Grim who put Narayan Singh to work. Grim picked him out of the routine business in Jerusalem.

I have independent means enough to labor free of charge if I see fit, and a pretty wide experience of emergencies that has made me in a sort of way reliable without dulling my appetite for adventure in the world's by-ways. It was Grim, not any Government, who studied me from every angle when I called on him in Jerusalem out of curiosity, put me to the test in a dozen ways without caring whether I suspected it or not, and bent my liking for adventure to his own ends. He did it with my permission, but not on my advice. And there wasn't another man in the Near East who could have made those seventeen thieves of ours risk their necks behind him without hope of loot.

You may say it was gall that let him make such dangerous use of other people, and I'll agree with you. Don't you admire a man with gall, provided it's not his own profit or some mere commercial end he's serving? I take it Drake had gall, and John Paul Jones, and Theodore Roosevelt as well as others whose memory more men cherish than the haters of the great prefer to think. I'm not one of those who choose to discredit any man who does things.

And it was luck and gall in combination, if you like, that now gave him the use of an "army" of a hundred and forty men, with a woman to captain them whose brains had been the making of Ali Higg. I won't say much for her military judgment, because we had captured her too easily for her to boast on that score; but she had the gift of bending Arabs to her will, and you know how it goes in politics—if you own the man who can swing the votes, the election is yours. The same principle applies in other walks of life.

I have heard a missionary criticaster say that because Ali Higg's army was mounted on stolen camels and fed on looted grain, as well as armed for the most part with rifles filched from the Allies, therefore Grim should have scorned to make use of it. But a quarter of a century ago I left off arguing with men like that. In the midst of unwesternized knavery Grim always uses the least unmoral weapon he can find, and makes the most of it.

We followed him out of the cave now to the narrow path, that wound along the face of the cliff to a point where it met a flight of ancient stone steps something like a mile long. The ancients who carved Petra out of sandstone evidently didn't mind a toilsome climb to church, for there was a place of sacrifice at the top of the hill. We sat down beside Ali Baba in a row with his men, overlooking the Roman amphitheater, whose tiers and tiers of stone seats glittered in the sun.

The valley two hundred feet beneath us, inside the amphitheater and all about it, was black with goat-hair Bedouin tents, in which the wives and daughters of Ali Higg's army were busy with their morning work of doing nothing, leisurely. There were eagles soaring above us, whose shadows raced on the dazzling rock below,

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and innumerable kites were circling on about a level with our eyes. You could sometimes catch the bronze sheen on their backs and watch the play of their wing-tips as they swerved. Along a ledge on the opposite cliff sat a row of vultures in fair imitation of us.

The colors of the Grand Cañon of the Colorado are about the same as those of Petra—the raw, real color out of which the paint for the universe was mixed, with the hard light from a polished turquoise sky to judge it all by, provided your brain will work in front of any such kaleidoscope. But we weren't there for the view.

"We'll give Jael Higg a chance to talk her old man round," said Grim in English; and Ali Baba caught the gist of it.

He knew enough English in the old days to rob tourists when the Turks weren't looking, and enough Turkish to cheat the police over the commission afterward.

"Whatever talking a woman does—and especially that woman—is the woof of trouble, Jimgrim," he said warningly.

But I saw other trouble coming, and laughed aloud, for which I cursed myself a moment afterward. A laugh is pretty easily misunderstood in that land.

The cliff bulged outward on our left beyond the opening of Ali Higg's cave, and around the bend there was another cave that we hadn't investigated; but judging by the chatter of female voices it was the headquarters of Ali Higg's harem. He evidently overrode the rule about providing a separate establishment for each additional wife.

AROUND that corner now Ayisha came—Ayisha the divorced—with all her belongings done up in a huge blue bundle, and the whole lot balanced on her head. The wives of a polygamist are not, I believe, noted for lying down together like the leopard and the kid of prophecy, and a chorus of mocking laughter followed her.

Seeing and hearing me cough out that unconsidered "Aha!" she naturally supposed me to be mocking her too, and we were mortal enemies from that minute. At least, she was my mortal enemy, and I haven't learned yet how to keep an affair like that strictly one-sided.

I once knew a man who kept a female panther for a pet; he used to say the dear thing only needed humoring, but I remember attending his funeral, because there wasn't any parson and I had to read the service. I kept the panther's hide for a souvenir—with a neat round hole between the eyes to show how she and I made friends at last. You couldn't help thinking of a panther when you saw Ayisha angry.

Balancing the enormous bundle—full of the loot of villages, no doubt—with the grace that is born in the Bedouin women, she made as if to pass us, and I think she would have done so if Grim hadn't spoken, for she was proud.

"*Ya Sit Ayisha,** what have I done that you should treat me scornfully?" he asked.

"Have a care!" groaned Ali Baba.

Having raised sixteen sons and grandsons, he posed as an authority on women.

She turned to face Grim, her body quivering like a fine Damascus blade as she balanced the load. He smiled up at her, and she seemed to waver between liking for him and disgust at me. Then with the sudden swiftness of a female panther making up her mind, she answered his smile with melting eyes and flashing teeth, and opened the war with me by dumping the bundle into my lap.

It would have damaged a smaller man, for it weighed more than a hundredweight and there were brass bowls in it, and knives and things like that; but I caught it on knees and shins, and, although I didn't plan to, kicked it forward so that it rolled over the edge of the path and fell two hundred feet on to the ruined roof of an ancient tomb below.

You know how a panther lays his ears back? She expressed anger just as effectually, even if you couldn't say exactly how she did it. It wasn't any use apologizing. I sat rubbing my shins, with both eyes watching for the dagger I felt sure would come my way in a second. But she passed the buck to Grim.

"Kill that fool for me," she commanded him, and he laughed at me whimsically sidewise.

"But I need the man," he said. "He is the *hakim.* He has the chest of medicines. Who else shall physic us?"

"Bah!" she exclaimed. "I would bastinado such a fool. He is the son of sixty dogs who gave me baby's pap instead of poison for the Lion in there. Thanks to

* O Lady Ayisha.

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that fool I am divorced instead of a widow. Throw him down after my baggage!"

"We can recover most of it, and what has been broken shall be replaced," Grim answered. "What are your plans, O Lady Ayisha?"

"I go to find my people."

"Where are they?"

"Only Allah knows."

You see, the desert hasn't changed much. Hagar did the same thing once, going out alone into the waste of sand and rock, in search of a tiny wandering tribe whose tents are here today and gone tomorrow; and thousands since have done the same thing, without enough acquaintance with the angels to get water whenever they need it.

"Be seated," said Grim, and she took him at his word, thrusting herself down between him and me, giving me the point of her elbow.

I shifted along close to Ali Baba so as to allow her a full six feet of clearance, still bearing that possible dagger in mind.

"And now," growled Ali Baba in my ear, "the *bint** believes she has him. He has bidden her sit beside him before witnesses, and has promised her a new outfit. Once before she called herself his wife, on half the provocation; and now who shall deny her?"

"He will," I answered. "Jimgrim is no Arab. We don't do things that way in the West."

"This is the East," he retorted, "and she will do things *her* way. *Inshallah*,† Jimgrim may prove clever enough to foil her, but I doubt it."

But more than cleverness was going to enter into Grim's dealings with that young woman. He was smiling, and a hint of worry underlay the smile. Nobody but a born fool would think of applying Western standards to judge her conduct by, and though she had meant to poison Ali Higg there wasn't a doubt she had lots of provocation. It was true we hadn't invited her to poison him; but she had made the attempt on Grim's account none the less, and we had taken full advantage of it.

If Grim had been disposed to leave her at a loose end I wouldn't have agreed to that; and even the wild Lothario, Narayan Singh, I think, would have objected. But Grim would be the last man to leave her unprovided for; I have seen him spend his scant spare hours befriending murderers whom he has landed in the jail.

"We go south to deal with Saoud, who calls himself the Avenger," Grim said to her. "Will you come with us?"

"I go where my lord wishes," she answered in the sort of voice that Ruth may have used to Boaz in the Bible story. Ruth came from that desert country too.

She must have known that Grim was an American, but I really think she meant what she said. Out in the sunlight there he was a lot better-looking than Ali Higg, because his face wasn't seamed by vice and anger; and she had grown so used to being owned by a man who resembled Grim superficially that it wouldn't be much of a task to transfer her affections. Grim for one thing had no other wife, and did not bastinado people.

"Until you find your people or another husband you must regard me as a father," Grim said kindly.

"But why should I look for another husband?" she asked.

That highly interesting question wasn't answered just then. Jael Higg came out, looked at the two of them, and laughed in that mean, metallic way that women use to one another. But I think that she, too, suspected that there might be a dagger to reckon with, for she made no direct comment.

"I am ready," she said in English. "My husband has agreed to my going with you. I shall bring a woman to keep me in countenance, but—" she glanced brazenly down the line of our men and raised her voice, finishing the speech in Arabic. "— I don't suppose there will be a man among you rash enough to try any liberties!"

I guess she was right, too, for her thin lips weren't of the yielding kind.

Some spirit of devilment took hold of me then; and, forgetting my rôle of Indian *hakim*, I horned in with a suggestion.

"Won't Ayisha serve the purpose, Lady Jael?"

Well, that woman was used to handling men by brow-beating and overbearing them. I suppose she had tongue-lashed into subjection some of the toughest characters between the Dead Sea and the Persian Gulf, and you get out of the habit of mincing words when that sort of job occurs

*Daughter, girl; in this case a disrespectful word.
† If God wills.

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frequently. You get fluent—acrid—fiery; or at least that had happened to her.

And she turned loose the full flood of her vocabulary on to me, speaking past Ayisha as if that young woman never existed, but making it perfectly obvious that we might divide the epithets between us. I daresay some of it was meant for Grim, too.

The fact was that the situation had got on her nerves, and all her pent-up rage had to find some sort of outlet. I had simply provided her an outlet; and Grim his opportunity.

He waited until she had finished, and then got to his feet and yawned.

"Let's have a clear understanding on two points to begin with, Lady Jael," he said in English. "I'll answer for my men. And two women on this expedition are enough."

The effect was as if he had struck her. She flinched away from him, and he followed up before she could recover and give tongue.

"I'll give all the orders. Everybody else obeys."

She bit her lip and turned her back on him. And then I realized that Ali Higg had been quietly watching us from inside the cave. She wasn't used to being rebuked in front of him. He came out and stood in the entrance, smiling ironically. I don't think he knew any English, but he appreciated that that termagant head wife of his had met a man who wasn't in the least afraid of her, and who knew how to manage her; and he looked almost good-tempered as he watched that happen that he had never been able to achieve.

"Call Yussuf," ordered Grim, producing his writing-pad and fountain pen, and sitting down again as if the incident were closed.

Now Yussuf was the spy, you may remember, with a home in Jaffa, who had brought word to Ali Higg about the plans and disposition of the British army in Palestine, and had fallen into our hands on his way back—a very dark-skinned man with little gold earrings, whose normal profession was spying for both sides to any quarrel. He was shoved along the ledge from his place at the end of the line by Ali Baba's men, and stood shifting from one foot to the other in front of Grim, clasping his hands first in front and then behind him as he watched Grim write.

Grim made considerable fuss with two envelopes, addressing both and sealing one inside the other. He evidently wanted to be seen doing that—wanted Ali Higg to see it; so I asked him in Arabic—

"Why two envelopes?"

There was no need to answer me, because Ali Higg made it clear that he was watching and listening. Jael, too, swallowed down her rage and faced about. Grim addressed himself to Yussuf.

"What do you want me to do with you?" he asked.

"Father of irony! What a question! Jaffa is my home. I was on my way thither when your honor decided otherwise. As a fish yearns for the sea I long for Jaffa."

"Can you make your way alone?"

"*Inshallah.*"

"Would you like to try?"

"Give me but your permission and a camel, and see me put the telegraph to shame!"

"If I give you a letter to take to Jerusalem, will you deliver it?"

"Father of surprizes! What is in the letter? Shall I carry then an order for my own arrest?"

"No. But there is an order inside that you are to be paid a full week's wages as a messenger, provided you deliver the letter without delay."

"*Allah ykafik anni!*"*

"You know what will probably happen if Ali Higg's men catch you?"

"Trust me! I know the dogs! They will find it easier to catch the wind!"

"And you know what will happen to your Jaffa property if you try to play a trick on me?"

"Your honor had no need to say that. I am a loyal man."

"I know you for a spy-for-both-sides," answered Grim. "If one overtook you on the way and offered you money for the letter I shall give you, it would be your natural course to take the money and let the letter go. That is why I warn you about your Jaffa property. If you part with the one you shall lose the other."

"Trust me!"

"I don't trust you. I offer you payment and impose conditions. I give you clearly to understand that failure to deliver that letter in Jerusalem will involve a definite and heavy penalty. Now choose; will you carry the letter or remain here?"

* God reward you on my behalf.

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"As well ask a thirsty man what he will do for a drink of water! Give me the letter!"

Grim gave it to him, and Jael returned into the cave to talk with Ali Higg. Despite the booing she had recently received, Ayisha got up and walked back toward the women's quarters as if she had forgotten something, and we saw no more of her for several minutes.

Grim's whole manner changed instantly. With a glance over his shoulder to make sure that neither Jael nor Ali Higg could see him, he pulled out a loaded Army revolver from under his cloak and passed it to Yussuf along with a handful of extra cartridges.

"Now go!" he ordered in a low voice. "One of Ali Baba's sons shall go below with you and pick you out a camel. Ride straight for that oasis where Ali Higg's army is camped."

"But they will capture me!"

"Listen, will you? If you go now you'll get there about nightfall. I don't think they'll be there, but if you see their campfires, make your camel kneel, and wait until they're gone. Better approach the oasis from the northward. They'll move off toward the south. The minute they're out of sight, feed your camel and then make for El-Maan; from there on to Jerusalem the way is easy."

"But——"

"You have your orders. Go!"

One of Ali Baba's sons went along with him to select a camel, and nobody except Yussuf worried on that score. We all knew which critter he would get; there was only one worthless specimen. Old Ali Baba laughed.

"The crows will say Allah is kind!" he remarked. "They would prefer to pick the bones of a fatter man, but any corpse is meat to them. Both Jael and the Lion know he carries that agreement. Father of ruses, he will be dead and they will have the letter before midnight; but why? What is to be gained by that?"

"Nothing," Grim answered. "But he'll live and they won't have it, if you ride hard."

"I?"

"Surely—you. The men at the oasis know you. I'm going to give you another presently, which Ali Higg will sign, ordering Ibrahim ben Ah to take those men southward at once and meet us at a place in the desert half-way between here and Abu Lissan. Take the best camel we've got, and keep to the southward. You'll reach the oasis well ahead of Yussuf.

"The Lion is sure to want to send either Jael herself or one of his own men instead of you; but I shall insist on your going. Then either the Lion or Jael will probably give you another letter with secret orders to Ibrahim ben Ah to capture Yussuf, kill him or bribe him, and take his letter from him.

"They'll very likely bribe you; in that case accept the bribe, but don't do what they say. Tear their letter up, or burn it in the desert. I think Yussuf will get through; at any rate, I've given him his chance."

"And if not?" I interrupted.

"Then, as Ali Baba remarked, the crows will eat him."

"That's Yussuf's end of it," said I. "But how about us? There'll be nothing then to keep the Lion and Jael from turning on us. They'll have that precious letter to the bank back, and——"

"Not they," Grim answered, smiling. "That letter to the bank is still in my pocket. If by some accident they happen to capture Yussuf all they'll find out is that I didn't give it to him after all. If they don't capture him—as I hope they won't—they'll still think he had it.

"They're likely not to turn on us until they've got that piece of paper back, but they'd surely try to murder me if they believed it was on my person. I'd sooner they had it in for Yussuf. And at that, we've given Yussuf a better chance for his life than he'd have had if we left him here with Ali Higg."

He said all that in English to me in a low voice, and Ali Baba, leaning past me to listen, picked only a word out here and there. I had to translate it for him; and when I had finished he sat meditating for a minute or two with an expression on his wrinkled old face like that of a man watching a motion picture—as if somewhere in the distance he were visualizing all the details on a screen.

"*Wallahi!* That is good," he said at last. "I am an old man. I lack sleep; and my bones are weary. But a man can play such a part proudly. There is cunning in it. Allah! What a thief was lost when Jimgrim took to soldiering!

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"I will carry word for him to Ibrahim ben Ah if it is my last ride, and if they crucify me at the other end! But I am an old fox and, *inshallah*, no fool follower of Ali Higg shall suspect me of a trick."

He was so enamored of the plan that he had to get his sons and grandsons in a circle on the ledge and explain it all to them, pointing out the pros and cons of it, and delivering a final lecture on the general art of practising deception.

"None of us would ever have been in jail if we had known as much as Jimgrim," I heard him say. "Observe: Jimgrim has their order on the bank for fifty thousand pounds. Let us suppose that Ali Higg and his wife Jael are the police. They know he has it. Does he bury it? Does he run away? He is no such fool. He lets them see him give it to another; he provides as far as possible that the other shall get safely away; and all the while he keeps the order in his pocket!

"Remains nothing but to provide a messenger for the police, who will surely not deliver their message; and he thinks of that too! Learn, ye dullards! Learn from Jimgrim, and there shall be no such thieves as ye in Asia!"

IT ALL worked out exactly as Grim had foreseen. He wrote out a letter in Arabic to Ibrahim ben Ah in the oasis, ordering him to take those hundred and forty men of Ali Higg's to a point nearly due south, about half-way between Petra and Abu Lissan. Then he interrupted Ali Higg and Jael in the cave where they were whispering together, and requested the Lion to sign it.

The Lion took his time, reading the letter two or three times over, and Jael offered to go down to the camp below and find a man who would carry it.

"I will send one of my men," answered Grim, and it seemed she had already learned better than to argue with him.

So while the Lion gained time by studying the letter and asking Grim a lot of random questions Jael went out and, taking care to turn her back to me, asked in a low voice who was the man who would carry a letter for Jimgrim.

Ali Baba stood up at once. She walked past him and signed to him to follow her just out of sight around the corner of the cliff. Whatever took place there must have agreed with Ali Baba's appetite, for he came back with his old eyes gleaming. He watched her return into the cave and then turned to his sons.

"I drove a good hard bargain with the daughter of corruption!" he remarked, and they all nodded.

I never found out how much she gave him, but dare wager that he extracted every sou the traffic would stand.

A minute after that Grim came out with the order for the "army" and sent the old man packing; after which Narayan Singh had a word to say. Grim always listens alertly when Narayan Singh speaks; for that long-headed Sikh would be fit to command an army if it weren't for one little peculiarity. About once in six months he is as likely as not to parade without his pants, and until the fumes of whisky die away the things he will say to his beloved colonel wouldn't get past any censor. He doesn't get punished much because he's such a splendid soldier; but they can't very well promote him.

"As I understand it, sahib, the purpose is to clip this Ali Higg's claws and yet save him from being wiped out by his enemies."

Grim nodded.

"He has two little armies. One, of a hundred and forty men under Ibrahim ben Ah, is to work with us?"

Grim nodded again.

"The other, of four and forty men, is up somewhere in the hills hereabouts?"

"Somewhere near the Beni Aroun village. They've been raiding it."

"And all the men that are left to Ali Higg are old ones and weaklings—sick, wounded and what not?"

"True. What of it?"

"This Ali Higg is a devil, Jimgrim sahib. He has a bad name. The enemies of such as he will be swift to take advantage. If you wish to see the last of him, good; leave him here with his handful.

"I have nine piasters in my pocket; that would be a too high price to pay for a lease on the Lion's life in that event. If you wish him to continue to hold Petra, better let him call in the other four-and-forty."

Grim laughed curtly.

"We'll not only let him have those men, Narayan Singh, but we'll provide him a good reason, too, for keeping them in Petra and not clapping them on our trail to pounce on us while we sleep."

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"Shall we sleep here?"

"Not if I know it!" answered Grim.

Having nothing better to do, and rather liking to exercise my wits with puzzles, I watched the eagles and tried to figure out what Grim might do to keep the Lion of Petra and his four-and-forty occupied. I thought of a hundred and one obviously futile stunts, but not one that would have fooled me if I had been Ali Higg. I asked Narayan Singh what he would do in the circumstances.

"That will be a simple matter, *sahib*," he answered.

So I bawled him out suitably, not seeing why a Sikh should put on airs with me.

"Any ignorant fool can say a thing looks simple," said I. "You know no more than I do what the answer is."

"Seeing it is I most likely who must do the *bandobast*,* that may be true," he answered patiently, "for many an ignorant man has served a purpose in his day. I will see now if our Jimgrim thinks as I do."

And instead of telling me his plan he went and talked with Grim in undertones. Grim nodded.

Meanwhile Ayisha had returned and was sitting quietly by, with her back to the wall of the cliff and an expression of masked alertness. They talk a lot about the fatalism of the East, and especially of its women, but in the sense in which the word is usually understood I have not seen much of it. I suppose you might call a cat watching a mouse-hole a fatalist.

Ayisha was watching points, and as alert for opportunity as ever was the brightest Broadway chorus lady. Given the right garments and a little training, she would have looked well in the front row of a chorus, by the way, for she had a splendid figure and could show her teeth.

Narayan Singh returned and sat down beside her. He looked amorous, the ability to do that being part of his equipment as a soldier. His great black beard was a little bit unkempt and his turban slightly awry, but liquid brown eyes and a flashing smile made up for all that.

"Father of bristles, what do you want?" she demanded; for he sat so close that she had to pay attention to him.

"Sweetheart," he answered, "you know I have loved you since the moment we first met."

"As a hog loves truffles," she retorted.

I thought that was a pretty poor beginning, but Narayan Singh is one of those soldiers who are only spurred to greater daring by defeat in the first few skirmishes.

"Nay, but as the bright sun loves a flower," he boomed. "Consider destiny, and wonder at it. Here was I born half a world away, hurled into wars and plucked forth with only a wound or two, sent on the wings of fortune into foreign lands and preserved by endless miracles from death and marriage, simply that I might meet thee, O lady with the eyes of a gazelle!"

Experts I have talked with say that all women should be carried by direct assault. I don't profess to know. But could you make love to a woman that way, with nearly twenty people looking on?

Our Arabs had started a game with dice, since the prospect of death had lost immediate interest; but they left off to watch and listen. Realizing that he had an attentive audience, Narayan Singh began to show his real paces.

He did not propose, though, to admit he was a Sikh in that land of Moslem fanatics. Our men all knew his true religion and nationality, but that was no reason why Ayisha should.

"We Pathans," he boasted, "understand the royal road of love! Our hearts burn within us and our spirits blaze when we at last meet the women of our destiny. And oh, what fortune for the woman who is loved by one of us! For we are men—strong, fiery-blooded men, whose arms are a comfort for our women and a terror to our foes. Hah! Lady Ayisha, smile and bless Allah, who has brought a Pathan of the Orakzai to lay his fortune at your feet!"

"Pig!" she answered.

Possibly she had overheard him say just now that his fortune amounted to nine piasters; that would be, say, forty-five cents at the old rate of exchange.

"Nay, lady, call me lover! Never was such burning love as mine! You doubt it? For a smile of yours I would pull the King of England off his throne and take the jewels of his crown to make a necklace for you.

"Behold: We march today against this braggart at Abu Lissan who calls himself the Avenger. A bold one, is he? A captain of eight hundred men? What do you covet of his? His ears? His nose? His head

* Hindustani word-arrangement.

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wife for a servant? Say the word and see! Test my love, beloved! Put it to the proof!"

His avowal was saved from entire absurdity by the fact that he had made the same sort of advances to her most of the way from Hebron; so she had a right to consider that he meant it, even if the proposal did not charm. She who had deliberately laid her net for Grim, in a land where all except the properly negotiated marriages are affairs of sudden fancy and violent abduction, could hardly doubt his earnestness. And, as I have said, all she was watching for was opportunity.

"You would not lift a hand for me," she answered. "Everybody knows the Pathan."

"Not lift a hand for thee, beloved! Hah! I would murder kings!"

"Nor would you tell me one secret."

"Try me! I would break open a king's letter, if thy tender eyes as much as glanced at it!"

"You would tell me anything?"

"Anything! By Allah and the devil's bones, I would tell you anything! We Pathans are no half-lovers!"

"Very well. Then tell me what to do to please Jimgrim," she answered.

He contrived to look thoroughly indignant. It was a good piece of acting. Jealousy blazed from his eyes.

"Do you want me to slay Jimgrim?" he demanded.

But she could act too. She smiled swiftly, as if his passionate avowal had not been quite without effect.

"Unless I please Jimgrim," she answered, "he might send me away; and then how could I listen to your boastings?"

"Ah!" he answered. "All lovely women have the wisdom of a snake! That is true. That is good reasoning. He might dismiss you. Ah! Well, listen then, beloved. Ali Higg has four-and-forty men, who will presently return to this place. It would please Jimgrim to know for a certainty that they will remain here, and not follow to attack us from the rear.

"Therefore go thou, beloved, and say to the wives of those men in the camp below there that our Jimgrim has promised two of them apiece to us, his men. Say that our going is but a ruse; that we shall return when the four-and-forty have left Petra and carry off our pick of the women.

"You may as well add that the only way to prevent that will be for them to keep their husbands close at hand. Thus you will satisfy Jimgrim."

She turned that over in her mind for half a minute and then got up without answering him. She did not even glance at any of us, but walked straight away along the narrow ledge, and started down the ancient stone stairway toward the women's camp.

As soon as she was out of earshot Narayan Singh looked over toward me and showed his white teeth in a perfectly prodigious smile.

"That is the way in which such things are done, *bahadur!*" he remarked.

CHAPTER III

"We're all set now."

THOSE four-and-forty men of Ali Higg's who had been raiding the Beni Aroun village were a much too dangerous factor for Grim to take unnecessary chances with. Ali Higg, Jael and Ayisha were accounted for; we knew nearly every detail of their movements since we entered Petra. But there were other women, whom we had hardly more than seen, and some whom we had not seen; so say nothing of the handful of men described by Narayan Singh as the "weak and wounded," whose number we did not know exactly, and one of whom might have left in secret to bring the four-and-forty in.

It was likely we could fight the four-and-forty and escape without more than a fair proportion of casualties. But with only twenty men all told we couldn't afford to lose one; and there were the Bedouin women in the camp to be reckoned with. They are pretty fierce, those women. Lawrence held Petra with a scratch regiment of them in one of his most famous battles, and thoroughly routed Turkish regulars, who are not troops to be despised. And now that Ayisha was spreading among them the report of our intention to carry off the youngest and best-looking there was more than a chance that they night send a messenger on their own account to summon their husbands in a hurry.

That trick of Narayan Singh's was one of those boomerang contrivances, in other words, that have to be snappily handled. If we were out of the way before the husbands returned, well and good; they were

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extremely likely to insist on staying in Petra to defend their women; but if they should return before we were out of the way, they would almost certainly attack us as the best means of preventing what we were supposed to contemplate.

So although we all needed sleep, and although Ali Higg importuned Grim to spend that night in Petra—doubtless for private reasons not unconnected with those four-and-forty men, although he made a great to-do about hospitality—Grim wasted no more time. And there was another reason. The women were not wholly without true ground for anxiety.

Our Arabs were professionals from El-Kalil, the home of the proudest trained thieves in the world. Thieving, to them, made the combined appeal of sport and guild craftsmanship; and there seems to be no such exhilarating sport as stealing women, that being the one game in the world that knows no national boundaries. Now that Ali Baba was away, whose word was absolute law to his sons and grandsons, the sixteen were not going to be any too easy to control—not with a bait like that Bedouin camp under their acquisitive noses.

When Grim announced himself ready to start there were only eight of them in sight. The rest had vanished, and there was only one direction they could have taken—down that mile-long flight of stone steps. Thereafter there were two ways—to the left toward "Pharaoh's Treasury" where our camels waited; to the right in the direction of the women's tents. It was a safe bet which way they had gone.

Most people think that generalship consists solely in the art of winning or losing battles, but there couldn't be a greater mistake. If that were really so, then chess-players would conquer the world, and all our armchair theorists would be enthroned as an aristocracy.

It is soldiers who win battles. The good general is the man who can get them to the spot without leaving more than a third of them behind in clink and another third in hospital. The hardest test of a man's manhood lies in leadership. Can he or can't he make the lame dog and the rascal so respect him that they'll disregard their own immediate comfort and profit, and give their best behind him in the cause he favors?

Of course, no two men are quite alike in their methods, and there aren't any definite rules, or we'd all learn them and all want to lead. Ali Higg's methods, for instance, were crucifixion or the bastinado for disobedience; Jael's was something like it, with scarifying language for milder cases. She looked at our diminished line, and glanced at Grim, and smiled ironically.

"Let's go," said Grim.

So off we marched along the overhanging ledge, Grim leading, Jael next, then Narayan Singh, then I, followed by our remnant bringing up the rear, chorusing abuse of Ali Higg for a mean host who had given them no presents. The Lion of Petra stood in the cave-mouth watching us with an expression such as you can see in New York any day on the face of an obvious criminal who has been acquitted on a technicality—near-incredulity, relief, cunning, and contempt for authority that can't convict him.

It seemed to me merely a question of how many hours it would take that tough Lion of Petra to recover from the lancing of his boils before he would set out to avenge himself on our rear. Men of his ambitious mold think more, as a rule, of personal vengeance than of high strategy; they are made short-sighted by the very qualities that have brought a semblance of success.

Without Jael to counsel him he wasn't likely to betray much wisdom, and we had her in control; but she and Ali Higg had done a lot of whispering together in the cave, and although I'm no kind of judge of women, not having had much opportunity to learn the home-keeping sciences, I was ready to bet that minute that a plan was in the wind for cooking our goose thoroughly.

And so, as it transpired, there was; but not even Grim, who can see farther than most men through the fog of any Eastern entanglement, had the remotest suspicion of what its form was going to take.

If it had been my business I would have turned to the right at the foot of that ancient stairway. Having handled lawless natives by the score in various parts of Africa, my method would have been to go into that women's camp and rout my rascals out of it with a heavy fist for those I could overtake and a long whip for the rest of them. Grim turned straight to the left and never said a word, merely nodding recognition of Ayisha as she came along and joined us.

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When we passed the mass of ruins on to which I had dropped Ayisha's bundle of belongings he sent two men to climb and fetch it. The force of the fall had burst it open, but Ayisha had enough faith in the future to stand by and make sure that they filched nothing, so, though the things were all scattered about and a few bits of hardware were smashed, the total loss didn't amount to much. I thought it a good chance to try to make friends again, and offered to pay her cash for the damage.

"Better laugh at me now while you dare," she retorted. "*Inshallah*, when the time comes you shall pay with all you have!"

I was sorry for her, and didn't feel like laughing, yet what else was there to do? If I had appeared to take her threat seriously that would only have flattered her malicious instinct and made matters that much worse.

Glancing upward at the ledge, I could see the Lion of Petra standing watching us, also contemplating mischief. She had been taught in his school and, like him, would certainly take a yard for every inch you yielded. So I did laugh—and regretted it later.

"You scare me out of my poor wits," said I.

"Since when has an Indian had wits?" she answered. "Allah made Indians to be the scorn of all decent folk!"

Wouldn't you have felt flattered by that? I did. If I had come so far without betraying my nationality to that young woman's keen perception it was likely I might go the rest of the way without failing Grim. And isn't it remarkable how an unexpected discovery like that sets you to exaggerating all the by-play with which you have hitherto half-unconsciously contrived a deception? All the way to Pharaoh's Treasury I walked, scratched myself, spat, belched and volunteered comments like an Indian, until Narayan Singh laughed at me.

"Has the *sahib* heard the fable of the man who would be king?" he asked. "No? He acted so like a king in advance that the people decided he would be no novelty, and did away with him."

There was something in what he said. If you act a part instead of thinking and being it, they'll find you out. So I left off playing Indian.

I told in the last story all about that fabled Treasure House of Pharaoh—really a temple to Isis, that stands facing the twelve-foot gap in a cliff, which is Petra's only entrance gate. Our camels knelt where we had left them in the shade of the enormous porch, and grumbled at being loaded nearly as abominably as our eight Arabs did at having to do the work short-handed. They wanted to wait for the others, but Grim would have none of that; so they fired a last fusilade of shots at the great stone urn above the porch that every Bedouin believes to contain Pharaoh's jewels, and we started.

WE HAD crossed the intervening space, and Grim on the leading camel was already through the gap into the Valley of Moses, when I saw our laggards coming. They had additional camels with them, which we needed, having lost three in the skirmish when we captured Jael; but they had brought six, and three of the beasts were loaded. I called out to Grim, but he did not stop.

"Aha!" laughed Narayan Singh. "We shall now see what the major *sahib* has to say to stragglers!"

We were half a mile into the valley, at that point a quarter of a mile wide with six-hundred-foot cliffs on either hand, when they overtook us and formed the tail of our line. They said nothing, and none of the eight who had stayed with us made any comment. Part of the game was evidently to hope that Grim would take no notice, and as for the loot, that was all in the family anyhow. But hope that springs eternal isn't always blessed. Grim called a halt at last.

The fellow who had led the filching expedition was Mujrim, Ali Baba's oldest son, a man bigger than I am and about as heavy—a serene-browed, black-bearded, sunny-tempered fellow (when not crossed) and the logical captain of the gang in the old man's absence. Grim counted heads, found all present, and asked what the disappearance had meant. Mujrim spoke up for his brothers.

"We thought there were camels needed, so we went and procured them."

"Good," Grim answered. "Did you pay for them?"

"*Wallahi!* Who would pay thieves for something they had stolen?"

"What else did you bring?"

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"Oh, a present or two. The Lion of Petra proved himself a mean man, for he gave us nothing except a meager bellyful up there on the ledge. But the women in the camp were ashamed of his meanness and treated us handsomely."

"Are the presents all in those bundles on the three camels?"

"Surely. Where else?"

"Nothing under your shirt, for instance?"

"Nothing."

"Let me see."

"By the bones of God's Prophet, Jimgrim, everything is in those bundles."

"If you're telling the truth, prove it. Let me see."

Neither smiling nor frowning, in fact giving no hint of his ultimate intention, Grim drove his camel closer; and Mujrim edged away, beginning to look worried, until at last he was alongside me and ready to go on retreating if Grim insisted.

"Search him, please!" said Grim.

I believe in obeying orders. You don't have to follow a man if you don't care for his leadership. I have chosen to differ from more than one man after the event, but never yet spoiled a leader's game by hesitating in a climax. Moreover, on one occasion when the leading was up to me I remember I beat a man half out of his senses for arguing with me in a pinch; whereas if he had chosen the proper time to air his views we might have agreed, or else parted good friends. And what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. I laid my left hand on Mujrim's arm and thrust my right into the bosom of his shirt, bringing out a couple of amber necklaces worth at least a hundred dollars each.

I liked Mujrim from the first. I liked him even better in that minute. Ninety-nine Arabs out of any hundred would have pulled a knife at me. He struck me with his fist—a clean, manly blow above the belt, heavy enough to have knocked me out of the saddle if I hadn't expected something of the sort.

His brothers naturally drew their weapons. They probably expected me to draw mine. But I was satisfied for the moment to keep hold of the necklaces and be on guard against a second blow.

"Why strike the *hakim?*" Grim asked him. "He obeyed my order. His act was mine."

"*Mashallah!*" he retorted. "That is a wonder of a saying. If it is true, then it was you I struck. Behold, I strike again."

And he let out another blow at me that would have broken the arm of a weaker man.

"Patience, *sahib*, patience!" Narayan Singh whispered, edging his camel close to mine; but big-game hunting is a pretty good teacher of that.

It was clear enough that Grim was up against mutiny. Jael Higg was smiling jubilantly in that handsome, thin-lipped way of hers, and Ayisha was calling out aloud to Mujrim to "kill the cursed Indian and be done with it."

I kept my eye on Grim. He approached within arm's length, and for a minute I thought he was going to be crazy enough to accept the blows as having landed on himself, and strike back. In that event, unless Grim should use his pistol he was as good as dead, for the Arab's blood was up. But he chose to ignore the talk.

"We'll keep the camels and pay Lady Jael for them," he said quietly. "You and the other seven walk back and deposit what you call the presents in the Treasury, where the women will find them sooner or later."

"*Wallah!* Am I dreaming? Who orders me to walk back?"

"Right smartly too!" Grim answered. "I'm not going to wait a week for you."

"Allah!"

Mujrim's face was black with rage by that time—the swift, volcanic temper of a lawless fellow checked. But even with the blood up back of his eyes I think he recognized that Grim meant to master him at all costs. There wasn't a trace of anxiety on Grim's face—nothing whatever but determination.

I told you all clearly before we started that I'd have no looting on this trip," said Grim. "You can't take advantage of me just because Ali Baba isn't here. Carry that stuff back. I shall wait here and search you all when you return, so you'd better bear that in mind."

Remember, those weren't men who had had military training. Probably the only people they had ever obeyed were Ali Baba, whose lightest word was law, the jailer at El-Kalil during periods of imprisonment, and Grim himself. Mujrim was like a big dog with a bone in his teeth, and the pack gathered closer around him, ready to help him keep it.

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"By the Prophet's feet," roared Mujrim, "these camels are all ours. We will find our father Ali Baba and return to El-Kalil. We are free men!"

"Free to obey me," Grim answered. "You weren't conscripted; you volunteered. Now, no nonsense! Get busy!"

It was touch and go for about ten seconds. I think if Grim had made a false move then, such as reaching for a weapon or using an oath, they would have carried out that threat and deserted us. The near-impossibility of finding Ali Baba, and the probability of all being killed by Ali Higg's men if they did find him, wouldn't have prevented them. But Grim made no false move.

I've always envied that ability in other men, rare as it is, to be utterly calm in the face of anger. I can use patience, as I've said, but that is a different thing altogether. Patience only exasperates, as often as not. I can keep my own hot temper in subjection; but it's there, and the other fellow usually knows that, with the result that I have had to fight in circumstances that Grim would have negotiated diplomatically. You can't be angry and convincing. I know that, for I've tried and failed too often.

Grim wasn't angry. Mujrim and the whole gang knew it. He had simply made up his mind that he was in the right and that it was a proper time to stand by what he knew; and it dawned on that gang of thieves that they would have to kill him if they proposed to have their own way.

I was close enough to Mujrim to read the changing emotions. He opened his clenched teeth a fraction, as most men do when they suddenly see the strength of an opponent's case. Then his sunny good nature came to the rescue. He opened his mouth wider—hesitated—spoke—and I knew that Grim had won.

"But it is too much to ask a man to walk back, Jimgrim!"

They were a first-class gang. I'm not discussing their profession, which was their affair, risks included. What I mean is that in a world in which most of us need no accuser, having consciences that truthfully blame ourselves, they had lots of redeeming manhood and less yellow in their make-up than afflicts some folk who never do anything wrong because they'd be afraid to. They loved that huge brother of theirs and were loyal to him.

They recognized instantly that he had yielded, and instinctively—swiftly—without any process of reasoning—they set to work to save his face and let him down lightly.

You never heard a more sudden chorus of abuse than they aimed at me. They knew I was an American, of course, but they were much too loyal to the practise of deception to rake that up, even in such a crisis. I was disguised as an Indian, and that was enough. They damned me as an Indian.

"The *hakim* struck him!"

"The cursed dog of a *hakim* thrust a hand into his bosom!"

"By what right does a *hakim* interfere with Mujrim?"

"Beat him!"

"It was the *hakim's* fault! He insulted our brother! Who wouldn't have struck back?"

"Is the *hakim* a coward?"

"Ha-ha! Does the *hakim* take a blow like an ass lying down?"

"The *hakim* is a coward! He insulted Mujrim and was struck for it, but daren't hit back!"

"Let the *hakim* pick our weakest man and fight him!"

"Good! True! It was the *hakim's* fault! Make the *hakim* fight! Give him his choice; Mujrim is too strong for him!"

Well, I suppose that ever since the world was concentrated out of chaos and old night whoever faced defeat has claimed a scapegoat. All I was interested in was lending Grim the full force of whatever attributes I have. I caught his eye, and he smiled whimsically, with one eyebrow curved into an interrogation mark.

The gang became silent suddenly—wondering whether I would dare accept the challenge; but I kept silent, too, for it was up to Grim. I knew he didn't doubt my willingness to fight; and I knew he would be the last man to refuse to make the fullest use of me; it was a question of diplomacy, which, as I have said before, is hardly my long suit.

"The *hakim* obeyed my order," he said at last. "Mujrim struck him. Mujrim therefore gave the insult. Let the *hakim* name what satisfaction he requires."

I didn't waste a second after that. It is one of my chief failings that I simply love a

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fight on equal terms. Men choose to differ about the name of the Power who parceled out men's attributes, but this one thing I know: I received my share of strength, and a most berserkerish delight in using it.

"Are you afraid to fight me without weapons?" I asked, laughing into Mujrim's face.

His answer was to vault from his camel without a word, throw all his weapons on the ground, and start to strip himself. I followed suit, and the rest all *naak*-ed the camels in a wide semi-circle.

"Don't use your fists on him," Grim whispered. "'Twouldn't be fair. These Arabs don't understand that gentle art."

Then he went and squatted on top of a rock facing the semicircle, to watch proceedings.

THE other men all squatted in front of the kneeling camels. Jael went and sat near Grim. Ayisha took up a position of her own on Grim's left hand, midway between him and the semicircle; and I had time to notice that both she and Jael were as eager for the spectacle as any one. After that I sized up my antagonist, and liked the look of him—as Narayan Singh, catching the clothes I tossed to him, did not.

"Stick a thumb in his eye if he strangles you, *sahib!*" he whispered.

Standards of ethics vary slightly as you travel farther East.

All either of us kept on were our cotton trousers, and there wasn't much to choose between us as the sun beat down on muscles bulging under healthy skin. I am a sunburned man, but my skin looked white and satiny against his coppery bronze. He had several inches the advantage over me in height and length of arm, and was pretty obviously quicker on his feet; but twenty years of roughing it have taught me not to trouble much about the other fellow's odds. The main thing is to reckon up your own, and discover his point of weakness.

"Are you both ready?" Grim called out, and we walked in and faced each other.

"Go!" he shouted, and Mujrim began to stalk me crab-wise with both arms thrust forward, looking for an opening.

One weak point became obvious at once. He considered himself a wrestler, and fully expected to rush me and win in sixty seconds. So I gave him the chance he looked for, and that first fall was easy; he went over my head on to his back on the sand with a thump that shook the wind out of him.

But all I scored by that, of course, was to spoil a little of his confidence. He wasn't likely to repeat such a mistake. He got to his feet pretty quickly, and I have seen a wounded lion look less pugnacious. The gang shouted a lot of good advice to him to wring my neck, kneel on my stomach, pull my arms out by the roots, and, in fact, to go in and rid the earth of me; and he threw one swift glance in their direction as much as to say he wouldn't fail them. Then I took the fight to him, and we closed.

Well, I've had many a good fight in my day, having to admit, with less shame than some think seemly, that I'm kind of willing to mix it with any strong antagonist who wants to take my number down. But, looking back, I think that was the best of all. It was rather spoiled at one stage by Mujrim's biting when I had him in a painful hold he could not break. But you can't expect a half-savage to act like a white man all the way, and he only tore an inch or two of skin loose. Besides, he made up for it handsomely before the end.

The game was fast, for one thing, which suits my temperament. Middle age hasn't made me a dawdler yet. And as we rolled and tossed over and over, grunting, and sweating so in the sun that we could usually slip out of a hold as easily as break it, the speed took the gang by the heart-strings, and from time to time I had visions of Grim beating them off with his camel-stick as they crowded in to scream advice to their champion.

I never fought over so much ground before or since. I knew I had my man beaten, and Mujrim, I think, guessed it after the first five minutes; he seemed to think his only chance was to spread the battle over half an acre, dragging and rolling me this and that way with the idea of wearing me out. But I was the stronger of the two, and it was I who did the wearing down.

There came a moment when he lay under me and gasped, and I even had time to grow conscious of surroundings—a thing you can't do if the man you're up against is

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still fit to make you use all you've got. Then, in between the bass booming of Narayan Singh, I distinguished Ayisha's shrill voice screaming to Mujrim to tear my tongue out.

There is something barbaric in a woman's scream that puts new fight into most uncivilized folk, and especially into all the desert people. Mujrim must have heard that shrilling, for he suddenly revived, and over and over we went with nearly bursting muscles in a series of sudden spurts, until we lay panting again pretty close to Ayisha's feet. I couldn't see her, naturally, for my back was uppermost; and Mujrim had murder in his eye; I did not dare relax the pressure on him for a second. His right hand was groping wildly for a handful of my thigh muscles, and what she did was to slip a dagger into it.

His fingers closed on the thing before he realized what it was, and before Grim or any one could intervene. I didn't know what had happened. My eyes were full of sweat and dust in any case, and the trick took place behind me. But Mujrim, suddenly aware of what was in his hand, threw the thing away like the sportsman he was at heart; and the effort gave me my opportunity.

I got a sudden hold that pinned his left arm to his side—rose to my feet, lifting him with the old bag-heaver's hoist that uses every muscle in your body, and was considering whether the time had come to lay him pretty gently on his back, or whether he needed another shake-up, when something stung the calf of my leg as if a snake had bitten it.

At that there was an angry yell from everybody. I hurled my man clear of me, and Grim stepped in between us, stopping the fight. When I could get the sweat out of my eyes I saw there was blood running pretty freely down from my calf into my shoe. Grim stooped and picked up Ayisha's dagger. The minx had been so bent on seeing me murdered that when Mujrim refused to use the thing she had picked it up again and thrown it—fortunately doing no more harm than to open a cut two inches long that bled more freely than it hurt.

Mujrim was more annoyed than any one. He had had all the exercise he needed, and lay on his back with his brothers all about him sluicing him with water from one of the camel-bags. He sent them to sluice me too, and called out to me between gasps for breath to be good enough to believe that the wound was none of his doing.

Ayisha was perfectly unconcerned about it. Beyond demanding the dagger back from Grim she made no comment. He gave it to her with the remark that if she should play a trick like that again he would have her hanged to the nearest tree; but she didn't believe him any more than I did, and showed her teeth in as merry a smile as ever lone bachelor set eyes on.

Jael, on the other hand, was indignant—not at my being wounded, for she wasn't exactly a stickler for ethics, and my welfare was no concern of hers—but because Grim should neglect such an obvious chance.

"The least you might do is to have the hussy beaten," she insisted. "You'll never make a leader of men, my friend. You don't know enough to be drastic. You're weak!"

Yet, if you ask me, I think Grim came out of it pretty well. There wasn't another word from the defaulters. Mujrim had been wrenched and bruised too badly to be fit for much for an hour or two, and it was out of the question to make him walk back. But Grim tossed the amber necklaces to one of the others, pointed with his stick toward the three camel-loads of miscellaneous "presents," and said his final say on that subject.

"Back you go now! Take those loads and walk!"

They went off without a murmur. And bear in mind that if there is one thing on earth that Arabs of their stamp consider beneath their dignity, it is to carry loads. They expect their women-folk to do that when camels or asses are not available.

Mujrim got to his feet after they had gone, and apologized to Grim handsomely.

"*Wallahi*, Jimgrim, you were in the right! There should be but one captain—and his word law, even when he says that white is black!"

It was pretty safe to say that looting was at an end as far as that expedition was concerned. And if you think, as I have heard some say, that it wasn't Grim, but I who pulled off that affair, I don't agree with you. You might just as well say that the cards had won a game, rather than the player of the hand; or that Bill Adams won the battle of Waterloo by killing eighteen

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Frenchmen with his saber. Hats off to Bill Adams, certainly; but the old Iron Duke was the boy who led trumps when the right time came.

I hate this modern craze for taking credit from every leader. Believe me, it takes a good man to persuade me to risk hair and hide in his behalf, as one or two of Grim's jealous critics might discover if they had the guts to try.

We sat down all together in the shadow of a great rock, women included, and discussed the fight from start to finish, each of the brothers claiming to know a hold that would have beaten me—which might easily be true, for I am no Gotch or Hackenschmidt—yet all equally averse to testing it. And presently Narayan Singh cut loose and told us wonderful lies about the wrestlers of Bihar and feats he had seen them perform at the marriage feasts of Indian rajas. A first-class romancer is my friend Narayan Singh, as well as a good soldier.

The rift in our lute was mended, not a doubt of it. That party under the rock in the Valley of Moses, where we drank warm water out of goatskin bags, smoked powdery imported cigarets and bayed about our reminiscences like dogs over a kill, is one of the pleasantest I can remember.

It was nearly high noon, and the sun beat down the floor of the gorge between ragged cliffs, making the air suffocating. Every once in a while a gust of hot wind would pick up a cloud of dust and take it waltzing along the valley, spreading a gritty mixture of air and dirt that you could hardly breathe. One or two eagles soared sleepily against the turquoise sky, but the kites appeared to have had enough of the heat and were hiding somewhere.

Only the centipedes and scorpions beside ourselves seemed satisfied with conditions as they were; and they were about the only trouble we had. Narayan Singh said that it was the blood from the scratch in my leg that attracted them and it may be that he knew; but, as I have remarked before, he doesn't need much fact to weave a tale from.

The part I liked best was Grim's whole attitude. He might easily have spoiled the fun by doing what so many asses do—smothering with flubdub whoever happens to have done his bit. He knew exactly how useful in a pinch my strength and willingness to fight had been, and in case I didn't know it, too, he made one comment, and let it go at that:

"If Mujrim had beaten you we'd have had to call this expedition off. There'd have been no holding them. But we're all set now."

All the same, I thought that an exaggeration, unless he excluded Ayisha from the reckoning. The gang now referred to her constantly in her presence as "the woman Ayisha;" whereas before her swift divorce from Ali Higg in Petra she had always been "the Lady Ayisha" and "Princess." If she was "set" on any purpose, then it was on snatching her own chestnuts from the fire of fate; and whoever should seek to prevent her was going to suffer unless he watched his step.

I would have excluded Jael Higg, too, from the "all set" reckoning. She was devoting herself, rather cautiously just then, in that thin-lipped way of her, to being a good fellow, joining in the conversation and laughing readily in a rather pleasant voice, with no more than a symptom of underlying harshness. But her eyes were hard—iron-hard; and they glittered whenever she looked at Grim.

I think she regarded me, along with the Arabs and Narayan Singh, as a man whom she could find a way of managing in her own good time. But she was about as empty of forgiveness as a Red Sea shark.

In my judgment nothing less than Grim's utter ruin would ever satisfy her for capture and defeat at his hands, although she undoubtedly proposed to make the utmost use of his brains and altruism until her time should come.

They made a wonderful contrast, those two, sitting side by side under the rock—she with her freckled, smooth face and reddish hair showing under a black shawl; he with that ready smile, the puzzling, almost book-worm eyes, and the expression, even with his face framed in an Arab headdress, of a forceful, imaginative business man.

"You are a fool, James Grim," I heard her say to him. "You don't know which side your bread is buttered on. If you would cross the Jordan for good and all I could make you king of all this country in a year!"

"That, or vulture-food?" he asked her; and laughed, and lit a cigaret.

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CHAPTER IV

"A cent for your sympathy."

WELL, our ruffians turned up at last, and brought back news with them. Ali Higg, they said, was on the rampage. He had left his aerie of a cave, and was superintending the saddling of a score of camels in front of "Pharaoh's Treasury."

"But not good camels, Jimgrim—mangy, miserable beasts. His men are using all the best ones, and those six splendid ones that we borrowed just now are all that were left of his private string. If he means to follow he will have hard work. He has collected a handful of men, but they are hardly better than the camels—fit food for kites—sick men, wounded men, men afraid of their own shadows—scarcely able to lift a camel-pack between them.

"We walked up to the Treasury and flung the plunder down, saying that our Sheikh Jimgrim declined to burden camels with such miserable stuff. He ordered his party of crows' meat to open fire on us; but one of them swore that our return with that loot must be a trick to start trouble. He said that you and the rest of our party were doubtless waiting close at hand to make reprisals, and the sound of the first shot would certainly bring you hurrying. The others, being all afraid, agreed with the first man.

"So we behaved like men who have been found out in a trick, carrying on scornfully and saying it was a pity nobody in Petra was brave enough to fight, since our Sheikh Jimgrim took no pleasure in defeating cowards. And what with one hot word and another we made our escape safely."

But that talk might have been a trick to cover up another one, and Grim made sure.

"Men who speak truth," he laughed, "are never afraid to prove it. Let's see how much loot you've still got hidden in your clothes."

They submitted to be searched with entire good humor, and Grim displayed an intricate knowledge of their ways of hiding things that made them laugh. But he had had his way; there wasn't as much as a woman's earring or a brooch among them, and they were all the better tempered for having proved it, considering now that the joke was as much on him as on themselves.

That is a great point, by the way, which some men fail to understand. When disobedience doesn't really matter much you can now and then afford to overlook it—especially if it would be easy to enforce discipline; because discipline that is easy to enforce doesn't make a lasting impression on naturally lawless men.

But in a tight place, when men disobey because they think they have you at a disadvantage, and to force the issue looks like sure disaster, then you can't afford to yield one jot or tittle of authority. Better die there with your boots on than give way; because if you fail then you'll never regain their respect.

And having won your point, by hook or crook, brute force, profanity or argument, be sure you have the whole of it. To use Narayan Singh's expression—

"Milk the udders of obedience dry."

Thereafter whenever you concede a point or two you'll find it safe enough, because they will realize it *is* concession, and not anarchy.

We were all in a rare good temper now, Jael Higg not least of us. I suppose the news that Ali Higg was on the move was what raised her spirits. Grim asked her what she supposed the Lion intended, but she shook her head and laughed.

"You're worse than a divorce court! You separate a man and wife, and ask the wife to account for her husband's doings?"

"I know nothing of lions," Narayan Singh commented. "Mine is a land of tigers. When a tiger keeps quiet he is difficult and dangerous to trap. When he prowls he is easy."

At that Mahommed piped up, Ali Baba's youngest son, poet to the gang, and bard, and arch-inventor of impracticable plans.

"I say let us lie in ambush in this hot *jahannum* of a valley, and catch the Lion as he ventures out. Let us take him back with us to El-Kalil and lodge him in the jail for folk to make songs about."

The notion was not impossible on the face of it. There were plenty of suitable places for ambush, as Alexander of Macedon found out, for instance, when he tried to force that gorge. But it would only have entailed the breaking of Grim's promise and the absolute reversal of his stubborn principle, that he had no right to impose, and therefore would not move a finger toward imposing, alien rule on Arabia, even in the interest of peace, and indirectly. It was Grim's notion of duty and enjoyment—and a good one, too, in my opinion—to

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prevent that very thing by drawing the teeth of contention and giving the Arabs a chance to work out their own destiny.

"Let's go," he said; and the only members of the party to grumble at that suggestion were the camels, who object to everything.

When you bear in mind that none of us—not even the women—had slept a wink the previous night, and that we had to face the hot south wind that withers the Arabian desert, and, impinging on the northern wall of that gruesome Valley of Moses, blows like a furnace blast down the ever narrowing funnel, our high spirits were a thing to wonder at.

None of us had more than a vague idea of the danger into which Grim was leading us. My only objection to him is that exasperating way he has of never discussing difficulties until after he has thought out their solution.

In my own way I'm rather a cautious man. I like adventure, but I also like to puzzle out the chances in advance, both of risk and profit, and so be prepared for them. Having anticipated ten per cent. or so of the possibilities, I can then devote more attention to the unexpected when it happens.

But the very method that annoyed me was like meat and drink to our rogues of followers. What they did not know didn't trouble them overmuch. Weaned on knavery, and used to haphazard devilment of any kind at all, all they asked of life was meat and drink, a chance to get away with other men's belongings, and something new as often as might be, to make up songs about.

To them Grim's very reticence was all in his favor, since it suggested mystery. And remember, that is the land where the tales now known in the West as the Arabian Nights first stirred men's imagination. They wouldn't have enjoyed things half as much if they had known exactly what was going to happen next.

Nor were they the only ones who enjoyed Grim's method. There was Narayan Singh. He rode his camel beside mine, and occasionally leaned across to boom remarks through the cloth that covered nose and mouth with the unaccomplishable purpose of defeating the hot wind.

"Hah! *Sahib*, this suits me! This is the true way of a soldier! Here today and gone tomorrow—today a bellyful, tomorrow a fight, and the day after —— knows what! I have no quarrel with the law of destiny!"

I may have felt like a man on a wild-goose chase. In fact, I know I did. But you couldn't for the life of you escape the spirit of the game; and even with bones and muscles sore from Mujrim's racking, and a cut in the calf of my leg that was beginning to smart unmercifully as it grew stiff and the hot wind dried the bandage, I felt about as merry as the rest did.

THAT Valley of Moses is as savage and as endless as the Khyber; but we emerged from it at last into a waste of hot rock, deep *wadi** and oleander scrub, with rounded, rolling foot-hills all about us, and in places great heaps of human bones all cracked up by the jackals—bones, I daresay, of the Turkish soldiers who had tried to turn Lawrence out of Petra during the great war, the skulls persisting, as usual, long after the other bones had lost their shape. I wonder why a man's rib-bones disappear first. Has it anything to do with Eve?

Grim called never another halt until near evening, when we found a thing they call a *fiumara*, which is a dried-up watercourse that winds between hills and widens until it reaches the sea. There isn't any one word in the English language that translates it, nor for that matter any exactly similar formation elsewhere. Excepting for a week or two in odd seasons of heavy rain they use those *fiumaras* as roads and camping-places, their winding habit suiting the Bedouin's wandering taste, and the curves between high banks providing shelter both from hot wind and observation.

Our protesting camels—they always protest at down-hill work—stumbled into the *fiumara* at a point where a peculiar, flat-topped island split the course in two and storm-water had hollowed out a deep, curving cliff in the near bank. It was a fine place to camp in, for there were three deep holes in the bed of the *fiumara* with two or three feet of dirty water in the bottom of them; and, in a land where no Bedouin will lead you to water at any price, stuff of the color of soup and the flavor of stale cabbage is a great discovery. Besides, the camels like it better than the sort that bubbles from a clear spring; and after all, the animal that carries you in the teeth of the *simuum** deserves to be considered first.

*Ravine or valley.
*Hot wind.

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The tents were pitched in a jiffy, for everybody craved sleep, and there seemed to be a pretty general impression that whoever could hurry first into the land of dreams would be considered unfit for guard duty when Grim should get around to making his selections. But I glanced at Narayan Singh, and Narayan Singh smiled at me; we both knew Grim by that time. He doesn't find soft billets for his friends when the watch needs keeping, any more than the wise banker pledges questionable credits.

So the mess of dates and rice was hardly eaten before the tents resounded with snores, those who were not yet really asleep pretending to be with all the more fervor. But as the moon rose over the rim of the hills of Edom, Grim called a conference of Jael Higg, Narayan Singh, himself and me, up on the flat-topped island, from which we had a fair view in the mellow moonlight of most of the country round about for a radius of nearly a mile.

The desert reflected so much of the moon's rays that at a hundred yards you could actually distinguish the tufts of hair and markings on a scavenging hyena. But down in the hollow where the tents were, all was dark.

We sat facing, in a square, on prayer mats. Jael Higg at first could hardly keep awake; but hers was the kind of intellect that drives its owner weasel-fashion, and it did not take a dozen words to make her forget sleep.

"Now, Jael," Grim began, and I have heard a doctor lecturing in just the same tone of voice a patient who can pull through if he will hear and use horse sense, "we're within five miles of the place where we're to pick up Ali Higg's hundred and forty men. Twenty miles farther to the south of that is the Avenger at Abu Lissan with eight hundred. If it comes to a fight you can guess as well as any one what our chance is worth. Something less than ten cents, eh?"

She nodded, every faculty alert. I rather liked her just then, for she was brave, whatever conventions she had broken. I know how necessary some conventions are, but Lord! I do admire courage in man or woman; and I never worry much about another fellow's morals, having all my work cut out to manage my own. I have met many a worse and more merciless woman than Jael Higg in what is called civilized society.

"You understand, don't you?" Grim went on. "I'm not interested in destroying you and Ali Higg. If the Arabs hereabouts would like you two for rulers, that's their affair. I'll not prevent that. I'm hired by the British to help keep the peace. They couldn't hire me for any other purpose. I want to see Arabia rule itself. That's my particular bug.

"It's too late to argue whether I'm right or wrong. We're facing facts. I'm —— bent on just that. And the Arabs haven't a chance unless they quit cutting up—not one chance in a hundred million.

"I happen to know that the British don't want to come over here and govern this country, for one reason because they can't afford it; but you all are busy fixing it so they'll have to come, because they can afford still less to have a constant state of war along their border. D'you get me?"

She nodded again—hard-eyed. She understood him perfectly. What most altruists don't understand is that the people they would benefit rather resent it than otherwise, and after profiting as much as possible intend to ditch them at the first chance. But Grim knew all about that.

"I don't pretend to know what's going on in your mind," Grim continued. "But supposing I were you, and you were I, it may be I might feel revengeful. I might think in that case that outside interference of any sort was impertinence to be punished without gloves.

"But, you see, you're a foreigner, too, Jael; you're from the Balkans, with a New York education; and Ali Higg's from the south of Arabia, which is a mighty long way off, so he's as good as a foreigner in the bargain. So I guess, as far as impertinence goes, the lot of us are in one boat. Let's call that account balanced, and draw a line under it.

"Then there's the personal side of it, and that's not so easy to argue about. I never met any one of spirit who enjoyed to take a defeat sitting. You've got spirit, and so has that husband of yours, and I can figure how you both feel. I'm sure sorry to hurt anybody's feelings. I know, when any of these brass hats in Jerusalem puts one over on me, I feel mad all through.

"There've been occasions when I've watched my chance and got even, with a shade the advantage by way of compound interest. That's human. And I'm pretty sure you'd like to knock the props from

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under me. Well, you're going to get the chance tomorrow morning."

Her thin lips quivered into a smile. It was frank, too; there was nothing furtive about it. You couldn't rightly call her treacherous, because she didn't pretend to be other than an enemy, seeking her own advantage in every circumstance. But she was longer-sighted than the Lion of Petra, and, having lived in America, understood something of the theory, at any rate, of giving the under-dog a chance. She knew enough to know Grim wasn't setting traps for her.

"D'you mean you expect me to kiss and be friends?" she answered. "Bah! I gave you that chance once. I offered to put you into Ali Higg's shoes, and you refused it.

"Now you think my position is beginning to be stronger than it was, with a hundred and forty men almost within reach, and you plan to make terms. Thanks! I think I realize the strength of my position, too."

"I guess I'll have to disillusion you," said Grim. "You think your men will have captured Yussuf and that the order on the bank for fifty thousand pounds will be safely torn up or burned tomorrow morning. You'll have to guess again.

"I don't care how much money you gave my man Ali Baba; it wasn't enough. He had orders from me to accept any bribery you might give him, and to destroy in the desert whatever secret message you might send to Ibrahim ben Ah.

"So, you see, the men in the oasis weren't on the lookout for Yussuf after all, and it's a safe bet that he got through. So we're just where we left off, aren't we? If you should turn on me—as you might, and scupper my outfit—as is just possible, you'd lose that fifty thousand, Jael, to say nothing of being bombed out of Petra by aeroplanes. Now—are we clear on that point?"

"Well? What then?" she answered in a dry voice.

Grim had played the hand well. He had finessed the trick. She hadn't a trump left, or so she seemed to admit.

"Why—hadn't you better sit into the game and help me euchre this Avenger person, rather than spoil the game for every one, yourself included? I'm going to put you in charge of the hundred and forty men tomorrow morning."

"Whether I promise or not?"

"Sure. What is your bare promise worth to me? You're woman of the world enough to know I'm playing square; and you've got too much sense to suppose I'd trust you without some sort of guarantee. I've kind o' proved that, haven't I, by making you give that order on the bank?"

"Well, what more guarantee d'you want?" she demanded tartly.

"None, except—you keep on saying I don't know on which side my bread's buttered—I'll feel safer when I'm sure you know where the grease collides with your piece. Once you understand thoroughly that I'm out to see you score off the Avenger person, and that if you put a stick in my wheel you'll be stalling your own wagon, you and I are going to pull together right well."

At that Narayan Singh saw fit to lend his counsel.

"All well and good, Jimgrim Sahib; but let me go with her. She knows you for a man of peace, who hates to inconvenience a woman; but me she knows for a Pathan, to whom it would be small inconvenience, and in certain circumstances quite amusing, to rid the earth of any enemy of yours.

"Send me with her, *sahib*. I will be the guarantee. Then if she plays you a trick there will be one more head in the world without a pair of shoulders under it."

Jael Higg laughed outright at that, and I think she was really amused at the notion of anybody acting as a check on her if Grim should let her go.

"Did you ever see a lamb act jailer to a she-wolf?" she asked; and at that it was the Sikh's turn to roar with laughter.

"Man, woman or child, you are the first who called me a lamb!" he answered. "Blood of Allah, but that is a good one!"

Like most Sikhs, he thoroughly despises the Moslem creed, and made up for having to pretend to be a follower of the Prophet by using the most atrocious oaths. They set even Jael Higg's teeth on edge, and she was no mealy-mouthed Puritan.

"I'll set no watch on you, Jael," Grim went on. "It's up to you whether you ride straight or not. My game must be pretty obvious. I'm going to pretend I'm Ali Higg. Ibrahim ben Ah, or any of those hundred and forty, would detect me in a second if they saw me by daylight, or even at close quarters in the dark.

"So what I want you to do is to maneuver them according to orders that I'll send you

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by messenger from time to time. They're plenty used to obeying you, and there'll be no trouble if you're so minded. You'll bear me out that first and last I've done nothing to discredit you with Ali Higg, or your men either. Now which is it to be?"

"What's your plan?" she asked.

And I took that for a good sign. If she had intended treachery, she would almost certainly have agreed first and asked for particulars afterward.

"WE'VE got to make the Avenger person," said Jimgrim, "believe we're stronger than we are, and force a guarantee from him too. I guess you've never studied the Duke of Wellington? You'd better do it, Jael, if you hope to succeed at your business. He claimed that he beat Napoleon by not having cast-iron plans. He said, if I recall it right, that the plans of either side were like their mule-harness. Napoleon's mules were all turned out perfectly with fine, strong leather harness; but when the leather busted they couldn't fix it; and so with their plan of campaign.

"But the Iron Duke's mule-harness was all ropes and string; when any part gave out they tied a knot in it and went on. Same with his plan of campaign. Same with mine. I've got a good general idea of what to do, but it's no part of my method to spoil prospects by being too darned definite in advance.

"You see, if you've a tight-drawn plan the enemy can find it out and run a spike into it. I've got all this Abu Lissan country in my head, because one of my jobs during the war was to make a map of it. I'll pass you the word from time to time where to go, where to hide, where to show yourselves, and what to do next; and if you keep your men in hand I think I can guarantee there won't be one casualty."

"And you'll leave me free to return to Petra afterward?" asked Jael.

"Why not?"

"With all my men?"

"Sure, if they care to follow you."

"Very well," she answered. "You're a fool, James Grim, but I think you're honest. There's no such fool as an honest one! I'll play your game this once. But I give you warning. If you lose it, I'll leave you in the lurch; and if you win, that's the end of it and we cry quits. Thereafter if I ever get you in my power don't count on my forgiveness! You had your last chance of making a friend of me when you turned down my offer."

"Sure," he answered, "I can sympathize with your personal feelings."

"A cent for your sympathy!" she snapped and I think she was on the verge of tears, although she was too proud and too much a termagant to let them fall.

"Suppose you go and sleep, Jael," he suggested. "We'll all need our wits tomorrow morning."

She rose without answering, started for the stepping-stones that led down into the bed of the *fiumara*, and turned again suddenly.

"What about the woman Ayisha?" she demanded. "Am I to be saddled afterward with her? I warn you——"

Grim laughed and shook his head.

"I allow she'd be more nervous about that than you," he answered. "No. I won't saddle you with her. Good night, Jael."

She didn't answer, but dropped down into the darkness, finding her footing with the nimbleness and lack of hesitation that typified her mental qualities by which she had established a position in the desert.

As soon as she had gone Grim turned to Narayan Singh and me.

"It hardly seems fair, you fellows," he said, smiling. "You're as sleepy and tired as I am. But tomorrow I've got to have my brains awake or we'll all go flucy. You've got to stand watch tonight between you, and no argument. Better stay up here, where you can get a good view all around.

"My tent is that one beside the big boulder in the *fiumara* bed; if anything happens, don't yell, but throw rocks until I wake and come and join you. You'll be so all in by tomorrow that you'll be able to sleep on camel-back. Good night; I'm off!"

"Nevertheless, our Jimgrim has a plan all cut and dried," said Narayan Singh as soon as Grim was out of earshot. "Only, he knows that that she-wolf is the enemy, and will not risk telling her.

"Moreover, he said, 'stand watch between us.' There was nothing about being both awake at once.

"Have you a coin, *sahib?* I have only nine piasters, and the Prophet of these people couldn't tell the head from the tail of any one of them. Let us take four-hour watches, turn and turn, and toss to see who sleeps first."

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"I'll toss you," said I, "but let's take half-hour turns. It's easier to keep awake for thirty minutes than four hours."

He agreed to that, so I spun a coin and won the first spell of sleep. Maybe I'm an expert. At the end of six or seven seconds he awoke me, and swore he had allowed me several minutes more than half-an-hour. Then he took a turn, and when I shook him awake he vowed I wasn't playing fair.

"Sleeping or waking, I know the length of a second and a half!" he grumbled.

But I showed him the watch. When he accused me of having moved the hands I showed him how the shadow of the moon had traveled, and demanded time out, in the bargain, to compensate for the minute we had wasted arguing. It was like a game of cat-naps.

All the same, however short the snatches of sleep seemed, I'm convinced that in circumstances like that short turns are always best. Anything may happen in the night, and it's better then that each should have slept a little than that one should have had four hours, say, and the other none. Events proved that I was right in that instance, anyhow.

CHAPTER V

"May you deal with your enemies like iron, even as you deal with me."

WE TOOK turns until midnight, when the moon, a day or two past full, was almost overhead, bathing the desert with honey-colored light in every direction. The desert is more full of night sounds than a forest if you listen intently enough, for the sand creeps musically and there is no rustling of trees to cover up the infinitely tiny noises of the lesser prowlers.

After ten minutes or so of sitting motionless a hyena becomes a lumbering rowdy, a jackal a clumsy clod-walloper, and a mouse seems to make as much noise as a man. But when a man moves, all is instant silence by comparison.

I was making the most of one of my short turns of sleep when Narayan Singh awoke me by the practical expedient of laying his right hand across my mouth. I deduced that he did not want me to swear out loud; so I bit his finger pretty sharply to prove I was awake, and lay and listened.

There was something moving sure enough, and it wasn't an animal. The sound was too irregular and stealthy for that of any creature with a right to be at large. It was a human, trying not to attract attention—than which there is nothing more compelling of attention in the whole wide world, unless you are one of those folk who live forever in cities with their ears and eyes shut.

As I lay I could see Narayan Singh sitting absolutely motionless, shrouded so as to look shapeless in his Bedouin cloak. I imagine he and I together might have been mistaken for a lump of rock unless either of us moved. And there are two tricks of moving that hunting teaches you; one is to do it suddenly and then be absolutely still again; the other is to change position so slowly that no eye, not deliberately measuring your outline against a fixed mark, can detect the motion.

If you know you are being watched the first is usually best, because if you are absolutely still again the moment afterward the watcher will doubt the evidence of his own eyes. But it needs practise. The one thing not to do is to change position in jerks, or moderately slowly.

You can't judge much from a superficial glance at such a veteran scout as Narayan Singh. He was facing pretty nearly due east; but that didn't mean he was looking in that direction. Almost the surest means of allaying the suspicion of man or animal is to seem to look another way. Most Sikhs are past-master experts at that.

I lay and studied Narayan Singh for about two minutes before I was sure he was watching something over to his left. And it was another two minutes before I made out the head of a kneeling camel protruding from behind a rock at about the farthest range of vision in that peculiar light. It might have been half a mile away, or less.

The rock was big enough to hide a dozen camels; so it seemed likely there were more behind it, because a man with only one camel, who wanted to conceal the beast, would have done the job thoroughly; whereas if there were more than one there the end one might have been crowded into view.

Almost all the way along, between the camel's head and the edge of the *fiumara*, there was a series of shadows cast by boulders and sand-heaps. They were short, because of the position of the moon, and considerably broken up; but they formed the only line which animal or man might hope to approach us from the direction of that

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camel unobserved. There were occasional gaps in the shadow of as much as twenty feet of glistening sand. It wasn't long before I made out a man's shape moving swiftly from one spot of shadow to the next.

He took his time in the shadows, kneeling down to crawl and becoming very difficult to see, but hurrying across the light after watching to make sure he was unobserved. The light was tricky, but I don't doubt I could have put a bullet through him by the time he came within a hundred yards or so.

However, there was no need. An occasional glance in the direction of that camel's head was sufficient to make sure that none of his friends was prowling our way too; and it seemed wiser to discover what he was up to, than to stop him.

But it wouldn't have done to try to arouse Grim. If one of us had moved to throw a rock at Grim's tent the man would certainly have seen us; and if we had called out loud enough to waken Grim the man would almost certainly have heard. We kept quite still, and let him come within twenty yards of the *fiumara*.

Then he lay prone on his belly, watched like a leopard for at least five minutes, examining every detail of the ground in front of him, and began to crawl closer, advancing a yard at a time and pausing to rescrutinize each shadow. He did a pretty good job on the whole. If Narayan Singh were not a trained scout and I a hunter, he might very likely have reached our camp unseen.

At last he reached the sharp brim of the *fiumara*, thrust his head and shoulders over it, and peered down; and then it became a problem what to do with him. If we once let him get down into the black shadow below, the advantage would be all on his side. I could see the moonlight sheening on his long knife-blade.

He might be an assassin sent by Ali Higg to murder Grim; but that was doubtful, because he dragged along a rifle with him as well, and the midnight murderers of that land don't encumber themselves with long-range artillery that might get in their way in a scuffle and prevent escape. I judged he didn't mean to take chances down in the dark, and it turned out I was right.

He would have had two bullets in him the same instant if he had started down toward the tents, for Narayan Singh said afterward that he had formed the same judgment and decision that I did.

However, he lay there and barked like a jackal instead. It was very well done. The pests had been snarling and yapping all around us on and off ever since the moon rose, and unless some one had been listening for a signal, or actually watching him as we were, that bark would have got by as a normal night noise. It only differed from a genuine jackal's bark in its regularity; he made exactly the same succession of sounds four times at equal intervals—a thing a jackal never does.

And somebody was listening below for just that signal. There was no answer, but he evidently saw somebody move down there in the darkness, for he was satisfied and drew back his head and shoulders.

Because of our position in the middle of the island we couldn't see down into the *fiumara*, but we heard footsteps; and presently the man spoke and was answered. We could hear both voices, but both failed to catch the words, or to distinguish whether the voice below was man's or woman's.

However, we weren't long in doubt. A head that was unmistakably Ayisha's emerged above the edge of the bank, coming up the track our camels had used. The man spoke to her again, and crawled away toward a good-sized boulder to his left hand and our right, fifty yards off along the bank. She followed him, bolt upright, walking like a ghost. It takes a woman to ignore the possibilities that scare a man into all manner of precautions.

They both disappeared behind the boulder. The single camel's head was still visible sticking out like a big snake's from behind the rock in the near distance, and there was no other sign of activity; so Narayan Singh and I dared to breathe normally at last, and speak in low tones.

"One of us should go close and listen to their talk, *sahib*," said the Sikh. "Which of us shall it be?"

"Both of us," I answered. "You go ahead. I'll wake Jimgrim and follow."

A couple of points were obvious. Some one had followed us from Petra: for who else could have guessed Ayisha's whereabouts? She might have made arrangements with one of the Lion's junior wives or concubines to organize communications as soon as possible after our backs were turned; I was absolutely positive that she had answered a prearranged signal. The other point was that Grim could keep watch

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on top of the island and be in the best position from which to issue orders, at one and the same time.

So I crept down quietly behind Narayan Singh, and threw a handful of small rocks on Grim's tent at short range. He would probably have fired at me if I had used any other means of waking him, because, seeing we had arranged the proper signal, he would naturally suppose any one entering his tent quietly to be an enemy; and I would have had to go quietly for fear of arousing the camp, whose noise would then have disturbed Ayisha. To cut short her interview with that night prowler might mean depriving Grim of valuable information.

AS SOON as Jimgrim thrust his head out of the tent I told him what was happening. He went at once to the top of the island, and I started after Narayan Singh. There wasn't a sign of the Sikh by that time. I could still make out the camel's head in the distance, moving rhythmically as the beast belched and chewed its cud, but there was no trace of a human being anywhere; and, as it happened, our own camels were making quite a din just then, down in the *fiumara*—dreaming or something.

The brutes usually have bad dreams and let high heaven know it. Their guttural objections and shuffling were loud enough to drown any reasonable footfall, so I took the simplest course and walked straight forward, taking one sole precaution. The jingle of a rifle-swivel in the night can be safely guaranteed to wake the seven sleepers. I don't know why, but there's the fact. I've seen many a long stalk spoiled by it, and some men never learn.

By holding that loose swivel I actually stepped on Narayan Singh before he was aware of me, which says something for his skill in taking cover. He was lying in broad moonlight between two ridges of sand on the side of the boulder nearest the *fiumara*, too busy listening to make a sign of any sort to me; so I went round to the other side and crouched in the short shadow.

I judged the interview was pretty nearly over. The two were conversing in such low tones that you could hardly distinguish Ayisha's from the man's voice; but I heard her say—

"And is Jimgrim known so well to the Avenger?"

"Only by name," the man answered.

"But the Lion knows no English," she retorted.

"*Wallahi!* Neither does the Avenger know a word of it."

"And Jael? Does she know of this?"

"Allah! Has the Lion a trick worth trying that she did not first whisper to him? It was she who thought of it."

"May Allah do so to me, and more, unless I drive a knife into her heart before tomorrow's sun sets!" hissed Ayisha. "Go now, or those two fat Indians on the rock will cease snoring and see us."

But the man would not go. He seemed to put a pretty high value on Jael's life. I heard him catch at Ayisha's garments as she started up to leave him, and although she cursed like a wet cat he wouldn't let go of her.

"Woman, if you kill Jael," he insisted, "that will be the end of all of us. Better by far slay the Lion himself. Jael is the real leader. We would all follow Jael if the Lion were dead."

"Into *jahannum* she would lead you!" Ayisha answered.

"That may be; for what is written shall come to pass. But better into *jahannum* behind her than to live here leaderless."

"Bah! Father of fear! There are other leaders."

"None fit to touch her garment. You must not kill her."

"That is my affair."

"I say you shall not."

"Son of sixty dogs, let go of me!"

She made a sound between a curse and a scream, as if some one had taken her by the throat, and I judged it time to interfere. It was just two strides around that end of the rock, and I beat Narayan Singh by half a second.

The man's long knife was drawn, and he had his fingers on her throat, as I had guessed. The butt of my rifle sent the knife spinning, the Sikh dragged Ayisha away, and I rushed the fellow before he could draw a second knife.

He was prone on his back in an instant, with the weight of my big hams on his chest. Narayan Singh pounced on his rifle while I searched him diligently for hidden hardware, tossing them out one by one. When I was quite sure he hadn't any kind of weapon left I let him sit up and recover breath.

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With his first wind he began to beg for liberty, vowing he had never harmed me, nor intended to.

"May your honor live forever!" he roared out; and I let him roar, for it didn't seem to matter now whether the whole camp was wakened or not.

Next he offered me a camel as the price of freedom. When I laughed at that, he swore he would pray for me three times daily for a year if I would let him go. He was dead set on getting away from us; he even offered me his rifle as a souvenir of the occasion. It was too bad to have to entertain such an awfully unwilling guest.

"Come on," I said, "and learn the worst. Perhaps you won't be beaten very badly."

At that he even offered to lie down and let me beat him—anything, in fact, if I would only let him go. On the whole I judged he might prove a pretty important capture, and as he wouldn't see sense I seized him at last by the scruff of his unwashed neck and forced him along in front of me. He hadn't strength enough to make me exert myself, but he struggled like a hooked eel all the way.

I felt like a New York cop running in a pickpocket, and the funniest part of it was that Narayan Singh strode along just in front, with his arm around Ayisha's shoulders, booming titantic love-stuff into her unwilling ears.

"What have I vowed a hundred times, beloved? Hah! If that had been an army hedged in with a sea of fire, I would have jumped the fire and freed you! What are bayonets and guns," he boomed, "to one who loves as I do?

"Come closer, Jewel of the Desert! Lean on your protector! We Pathans of the Orakzai have hairy arms, but they are strong to nestle in. Let me look into those liquid eyes and see how fairer they are than the moon and stars!"

"Father of pigs!" she retorted. "Get away from me. I choose to walk alone."

"Nay, beloved; come closer! One danger is enough to run for this night. Next we must face Jimgrim, and you need a protector from his wrath. He will accuse you of treachery while he slept.

"You must lean on me. You must depend on me to defend you. We Pathans of the Orakzai are wondrous liars. A man's sword and a man's tongue should be ready for any occasion, say we. Now put me to the test, O Heart of all Loveliness. What shall we tell Jimgrim?"

But though he called her by a fabulous long string of jeweled names, offered her the hills of Edom for a kingdom and the fairest cities of the earth for plunder, he could get no answer out of her at all, until we came to the brim of the *fiumara* and were challenged by three separate members of our startled camp. We had to answer the challenge right swiftly, for the click of rifle-bolts preceded it.

Then Narayan Singh took Ayisha by both arms and swung her in front of him.

"Must I tell him all I heard?" he asked. "Oh, Heart's Delight, don't put me to that necessity!"

"Black pig! Let go of me!"

But he held on, and my prisoner—no more aware than I was that the Sikh had not been able to hear the first part of the conversation at all—piped up in support of him.

"I have a tale I shall tell," he announced. "Listen, Lady Ayisha, this great fellow is a friend of yours. Humor him. He is willing to stand between us and this Jimgrim. Better let me tell the tale, and you confirm what I say. None ever believes a woman, but he will believe me."

At that Narayan Singh laughed gruffly, and I detected a note of triumph, although he affected defeat.

"*Malaish*," * he said with a shrug of his great shoulders and loosing Ayisha's arms; "there is nothing for it but to tell the truth. I shall tell Jimgrim every word I overheard from first to last."

He had gained his point. Ayisha made up her mind that he had heard everything, and whatever her first intention might have been she decided now to make a virtue of necessity.

"I need no ignorant Pathan to speak for me!" she retorted. "It is I, not you, who will tell him. Get behind me, son of sixty dogs!"

But instead of obeying that command he laughed aloud, picked her up like a child, and carried her down the dark track into the *fiumara*. She didn't seem to mind that part of it. In fact, one of the most surprizing things anywhere east of, say, the North Sea is the complaisance with which women submit to being seized and carried off.

He carried her straight up to Grim, and

*No Matter.

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set her on her feet in front of him on top of the island, and I think that by the time she got that far her private opinion of the Sikh had undergone considerable modification.

I SENT my prisoner up between two of our Arabs, and went to have a quiet look at Jael's tent. There wasn't a sound. I hardly cared to open the fly and look in, so I counted the camels. The Bishareen dromedary wasn't there.

I returned to her tent, and this time didn't hesitate to peer inside. It was empty. The sheepskin rug and blankets were gone too.

Several of our Arabs were still asleep among the camels; it wouldn't have been the slightest use to arouse and question them. The remainder had slept until my prisoner's bellowing disturbed them, and wouldn't believe me at first when I said the Bishareen was gone. I went up to Grim with the bad news, but he was aware of it already.

"There she goes," he said before I could begin to tell him.

He nodded toward the northeast. The little Bishareen was eating stick and galloping at top speed in the direction of the rock from behind which Ayisha's visitor had come—silhouetted softly in the moonlight just out of reasonable rifle-shot. It looked exactly like one of those up-to-the-minute motion pictures, especially as there was too much noise in our camp by that time for us to hear the camel's footfall. Most of our men were clambering out of the *fiumara* and shouting to Grim to know whether they should open fire or not. He shouted to them to do nothing.

What Jael had accomplished looked remarkably like a miracle to me. It was obvious, of course, now why the camels had been making all that noise when I started to follow Narayan Singh. But how in the world she had saddled that beast and got away without disturbing the men who slept by the picket stakes was the mystery, unless there was a traitor in our camp. The saddle alone was as much as most women could lift.

She must have chosen the exact moment when Grim and I were both engaged in climbing out of the river-bed, he in one direction, I in the other, to start up the *fiumara* and disappear around the nearest bend. The rest would be easy enough; no doubt there were plenty of places higher up where a camel could find footing and negotiate the bank.

We hadn't a beast in camp that could overtake that Bishareen. It could go like the wind, and Jael was about half the weight of anybody we could mount and send in pursuit of her. So unless Grim chose to try long-range shooting by moonlight, which in ninety-nine per cent. of cases is a useless waste of ammunition, there was nothing much to do but watch.

She headed straight for that big rock, from behind which a camel's head still protruded, and presently disappeared.

"Now," said Grim, "what's the excitement all about?"

He looked cheerful enough to have planned the whole business.

Ayisha squatted down comfortably in front of him, giving the rest of us a good view of her back. That trick is part of a woman's language; no male could ever contrive it in exactly the same way, suggesting indisputable superiority of intellect, class, knowledge, opportunity, privilege and everything. Grim waited for her to speak first, and she kept him waiting, while my prisoner trembled in his skin and Narayan Singh stroked his great beard upward with both hands.

"O Jimgrim," she said at last, "you would better make an end of foolishness and marry me."

Nobody gasped. Nobody cracked a smile—least of all Grim. There wasn't really anything to smile about, considering time, place and circumstances. History was merely repeating itself. For the hundred-millionth time a female of the species considered that a man was captive of her bow and spear, and the member of the less conventional sex was trying to make the most of opportunity.

"Why, O Lady Ayisha?" Grim asked her blandly.

"Am I not fair to look at? This Pathan of yours vows I am fairer than the moon and stars. He ought to know, for he has loved many women in many lands."

"*Shellabi kabir!*" * Grim answered. "The fellow flattered stars and moon by speaking of them in the same breath. Yet the Prophet said, Ayisha, that the houris wait for us in paradise. Who should anticipate the joys of that world in the make-belief of this?"

* Extremely beautiful.

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"Yet the Prophet did!" she answered. "He had many wives."

"Truly, but then he was a prophet," Grim replied. "Can you tell me why I should pause in the midst of happenings to make a marriage? There are twenty lives depending on my judgment. A mistake, a false move, and these friends of mine are dead men."

"Father of wise answers, that is why you must marry me," she answered. "No man can find his way out of the net a clever woman weaves. Jael has you in the toils. You need me, I tell you, to help you out of them."

"It seems, though, that you are not too far-away just now to help me if you will," he suggested.

"*Inshallah,* if you marry me now, I will help you indeed," she answered. "You shall rule this country."

That was two women within a day who had proposed to make a king of him. Wouldn't you have felt tickled? I know I would, although nobody ever made me the proposal. Bearing in mind Narayan Singh's method of making love, and allowing a good margin for Eastern hyperbole in general, there was still much more than random flattery in the offer.

There are some men who can lead people —who can understand an alien race, deserve their allegiance and lift them toward progress. Grim undoubtedly had that gift. And how many exceptions are there to the rule in such cases that women have been first to recognize the fact, and to egg the man on in spite of himself? But Grim has less personal vanity than any man I know, as well as a business instinct for appraising facts in all their bearings.

" 'Between the promise and the deed a man may marry off his ugly daughter,' " he quoted, using the famous Arab proverb. "Tell me what you know and I will listen."

"You are at Jael's mercy," she said, "unless you consent to be guided by me."

"How then?"

"You gave her too much opportunity. You let her talk with Ali Higg. You left them alone together. Then, like one who has set match to gunpowder, you came away, knowing nothing of what the fire said to the powder. But I listened, and I heard a little. And what I did not hear, another heard; and this shivering fool came in the night, bringing me word of it."

"I listen, O Lady Ayisha," said Grim.

"As a man to a tale that is told between waking and sleeping, or as a man to his wife, do you listen?"

"I have but one pair of ears," Grim answered.

"Aye, that listen to the she-wolf Jael!"

"That listen to all voices, whoever speaks. Who am I that should bury my head in the sand like an ostrich?"

She held her tongue for a full minute, while an owl hooted weirdly in the darkness up the *fiumara.* Then—

"Unless I speak you are ruined," she said at last.

Grim considered it his turn to wait. He simply watched her face with interest. The rest of us hardly breathed. At the end of a minute, since he made no suggestion:

"What if I do not speak?" she asked. "And what if I do?"

"If you do not, you are not my friend."

"And?"

"I have other friends," he answered calmly.

"None like me," she retorted.

"Truly. My other friends drive no hard bargains before they consent to tell me what they know."

Maybe Ayisha had forgotten Narayan Singh; more extraordinary things than that have happened in the strain of concentration. There was a general once who forgot an army corps. Or perhaps she thought he was so enamored of her that he would hold his tongue. At any rate, she ignored him, which was easy enough while he stood alongside me behind her.

But he bulks big in any kind of light, and she could not pretend not to see him when he strode around behind Grim and stood there facing her, with folded arms and his eyes fixed on her face. He said nothing. He didn't even cough to draw attention to himself. But it was an ultimatum, and she realized it.

I half-suspected by that time that the Sikh was bluffing. It seemed to me that if he had really overheard all that she said to my prisoner, and that the prisoner had said to her, Narayan Singh would have helped Grim out of a predicament and saved time by telling all he knew at once. But if she, too, suspected he was bluffing, she didn't dare challenge him.

"May you deal with your enemies like iron, even as you deal with me," she said to

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Grim at last. "Behold, it is the way of men to devour the women's harvest; and the women plant again, and reap again, and grind again, that their lords may eat. I will tell all; then, like all women, I will desire my lord's favor."

I COULD see the milk-white of Narayan Singh's teeth in the midst of his black beard, but if she saw the smile too, she pretended not to notice it. Grim merely nodded to her to continue.

"In the cave in Petra Jael said to Ali Higg:

" 'Behold, this fellow comes in your guise, letting men believe that he is the Lion of Petra. By a trick he has worsted you, for he is very cunning. In your name he will go against the Avenger, and it is well to let him go, for because of his cunning he will be too much for the Avenger, and will bring him to terms likewise. Thereafter both you and the Avenger will be as strong men bound, and this Jimgrim will be reckoned a great one. Like honey in his mouth is the success he tastes already. But is honey sweet only to the bees?' "

My prisoner was in as abject terror as I have ever known a man to be. I had my leg against him, so as to be aware of any movement he might make, and he was shivering as if he had the ague. I expect he was thinking of what Ali Higg would do to him if it ever transpired that he had helped betray the Lion's plans.

Grim nodded again, and Ayisha went on with her story.

"Ali Higg was unwilling to be urged into action, because his neck is sore; and besides he is ever opposed to Jael's plans at first, although always yielding to her finally. He said:

" 'Let him go against the Avenger. Who am I that should complain when Allah sends me aid? Can I overcome the Avenger without help? This Jimgrim, as you say, is cunning, and I shall reap the fruit of his cunning, and all will be well.'

"But she answered:

" 'Fool! Not thou, but he will reap. Who labors for other than his own reward? Hast thou ruled in Petra all these months, to believe yet that men risk their lives for the love of it, or for the love of thee?

" 'Consider now: There are three parties to this—thou, this Jimgrim, and the Avenger. Whose is the advantage to begin with? The Avenger's! And whose is the disadvantage? Thine!

" 'But this Jimgrim has taken on himself thy part. Take thou then his part. Jimgrim is the Lion. Let the Lion be Jimgrim. A sheep in the skin of a lion; a lion pretending to be a sheep! He has twenty men in all. Go thou abroad with twenty.' "

Ayisha paused dramatically to give her revelation time to take effect. In lands where almost no men, and even fewer women, can read, the art of reporting orally maintains a high plane. She waited for Grim to nod once more before resuming.

"Ali Higg was doubtful and afraid. He complained about his neck. He feared to leave Petra ungoverned. But she told him to cover up his neck with bandages, and to hide the bandages beneath the *kuffiyi.* *

"He said he knew no English, and therefore could not pretend to be Jimgrim. But she said:

" 'Neither does the Avenger or any of his men know English; and is not Jimgrim pretending to be an Arab? Can not an Arab pretend to be an Arab likewise?'

"So he said again that if Petra were left ungoverned there would be no knowing what might happen. And she said:

" 'Then I myself will return and govern Petra. I will go with this Jimgrim, and make believe to fall in with his plans, displaying reluctance for the sake of being all the more convincing when I yield; but I will seize the first chance to escape and return to Petra, and occupy thy place until thou come again.'

"So spake Jael, and the Lion finally agreed."

She paused, and Grim spoke at last.

"Do she and the Lion still propose to let me deal with the Avenger?"

"Surely. And to defeat you afterward."

"Then who do they think will make Ibrahim ben Ah and his hundred and forty men obey me, seeing that Jael was to have contrived that part?"

"The Lion thought of that at once," Ayisha answered. "But Jael said:

" '*Malaish.*† This Jimgrim thinks himself so clever. Let him puzzle out that problem after I have left him. If he finds a way, well and good. If not, we shall be no worse off, and an intruder will have burned his fingers. If Ibrahim ben Ah should

* Headdress.
† No matter.

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suspect him, and lay hands on him, and kill him, let that be the judgment of Allah, and we will find another way to deal with the Avenger.' "

"And has Ali Higg left Petra?"

"Surely."

"And that camel yonder, whose head appeared just now from behind the rock?"

"There were three camels. This man came with two others to bring word to me. Jael knew nothing of that, but she will know now. That is why this man is afraid.

"But as the other two came to protect this one, and knew nothing, it may be they will tell her nothing; and this man, who is a father of lies always, can tell Jael that the Lion sent him to help her escape. So he has no need to feel so very much afraid, although he is a great coward."

Grim raised his eyebrows comically. It was a predicament all right.

CHAPTER VI

"I will stick that pig Yussuf when I find him!"

THE news spread through our camp on a twinkling, for the two men whom I had sent up to Grim with the prisoner while I looked into Jael's tent had been listening to Ayisha's story, and one of them ran down below to tell his brothers.

From their viewpoint it was a wonder of a tale, full of enchanting possibilities and side issues, and especially gratifying because it would oblige Grim to display his genius for counter-intrigue. Their faith in him was measureless, and why not? Had he not outwitted Ali Baba, grandsire of the gang, and bound the whole lot by good-will to his chariot wheels? The man who could accomplish that was capable of anything. We could hear them down in the dark *fiumara* exclaiming: *"Allah!"*—*"Mashallah!"*—*"Mallahi!"* as the tale unfolded and its ramifications dawned on their appreciative minds.

It was no use my trying to suggest anything. I'm no diplomatist, and even strategy is a thing I can appreciate far better than invent. I suppose if we all were strategists it would take a man from Mars with something new, like "relativity," to lead us anywhere; and if we were all just plain Merry Andrews with a pound or two of muscle on our arms and legs, we'd reduce the world to a fine mess of hash. Each man to his profession, then, and let the man whose job is thinking have a chance to think.

Narayan Singh stood like a statue, making no sign. Grim sat looking at Ayisha, and the prisoner still trembled against my leg, although not so violently. Suddenly Grim pointed a finger at him.

"Go!" he ordered. "Give him back his weapons, somebody."

A startled cat would have taken longer to obey that order. Inside a minute the fellow was scrambling up the far bank of the *fiumara*, pursued by volleys of ridicule from our men. He wasted no time taking cover as he ran, but raced his own shadow across the open to the pace where he had left his camel.

Ayisha with her placid brow and burning eyes had been doing some thinking meanwhile on her own account. She spoke at last—to Grim, of course; Narayan Singh and I hardly figured any longer in her consciousness.

"So now I have told all the truth. Am I unworthy of my lord's favor? I am as one who had a fortune and has given all of it. Shall I be cast off like a broken shoe?"

Grim seemed to come out of a brown study suddenly, and Narayan Singh heaved an enormous sigh of relief. I believe he had been praying to all the gods of the Hindu pantheon to give his leader wisdom; for he forgets his Sikhism in times of stress and falls from orthodoxy, speculating that there might be virtue in the old gods after all.

"There is no way, is there, by which Ibrahim ben Ah could have learned of your divorce?" Grim asked suddenly.

"Not unless old Ali Baba has told him," Ayisha answered.

"When that old fox parts with information he isn't paid for, it will be time for Gabriel to sound the last trump," Grim said, smiling. "Have you ever given orders to Ibrahim ben Ah, Ayisha?"

"A hundred times. I was the Lion's second wife. Once, when Jael was away with the Lion on a raid against the men of El-Kerak, I was left in sole command in Petra, with Ibrahim ben Ah and fifty men to do my bidding. I am a sheikh's oldest daughter," she added proudly. "I am used to being obeyed."

"And will you help me now?" Grim asked her.

"Even unto the end of the world," she

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answered in a voice that would have melted icebergs.

Her promise was likely more reliable than Jael Higg's, but she made it clear she would demand her price. It was difficult to guess whether she was really in love with Grim; not because he wasn't lovable from a woman's viewpoint, for at least a score of women of his own speech, and several from his own country, have made small secret of their regard for him. But the customs of the country entered into it.

Where women are practically bought and sold—occasionally given by their parents—and very often plundered like raided cattle, the sex acquires a viewpoint that the West can't grasp. The famous advice of the Quaker to his son, not to love money, but to love where money is, has its adaptation in Arabia; and it might be that Grim's peculiar genius pointed the way to her ambition.

Whether she would be really heart-broken in our sense of the word when the inevitable truth should dawn that Grim lived in another world, as it were, and never would dream of making her his wife, was a conundrum. Of one thing, though, I was certain: He would never be able to explain his reason to her. She was a sheikh's daughter—a princess of the pathless desert, fit to marry any one. The fact that her father lived in a goat-hair tent with several wives had nothing at all to do with it. However, that was Grim's problem, or perhaps Narayan Singh's; certainly not mine.

Grim told her to go to her tent, and she obeyed him as meekly as Ruth obeyed Boaz. I thought he was going to talk things over with the Sikh and me, but after another minute's silence he dismissed us as well.

"I've had all the sleep I need," he said. "I think I'll keep watch up here and puzzle out the workings of this mix-up. Suppose you fellows turn in down below there and make up for lost time. I guess I'll maybe need all your faculties when daylight comes."

So off we went, and turned in. It's mortifying in a way to be sent to bed like a small boy when your own life as likely as not hangs on the issue of deliberation. But there's nothing to be gained by intruding either your opinions or curiosity on a man who does his thinking best when undisturbed. I had a sort of nettled feeling that I'm not sure I wasn't entitled to, and that kept me from falling asleep for an hour.

After that Narayan Singh's snores made sleep impossible, until I put the heel of a tent-peg in his mouth. And even then the intermittent roars of laughter of our gang, who would wake one another to discuss some fresh angle of the situation, kept me from little more than dozing until nearly dawn. They seemed to consider that Ali Higg's turning the tables by masquerading as Jimgrim was the most prodigious joke that had ever been sprung on an amusing world.

When I left the tent at daybreak Grim was still sitting up there on the island, motionless, not even smoking. I went up at once, to find out whether he had formed a plan.

"Well?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "I think all's well. I'd like to pull up stakes and get a move on, but we've got to consider the camels; the silly fools have lain there all night long with good corn on mats beside them and haven't touched a mouthful. We've got to wait and let them eat."

"What after that?"

"I want you and Narayan Singh to scout ahead and get in touch with Ibrahim ben Ah. The best bet would be to find Ali Baba first, but that's too much like luck to happen. He's a shrewd old fox, and if he gets first sight of you he's dead sure to try to give Ibrahim ben Ah the slip and give you the news out of earshot.

"Next best after that would be for you to take his place with Ibrahim ben Ah, and let the old man come to me with information. Somehow or other I've got to know the exact state of mind of that army of Ali Higg's before we try the long chance."

"Which is?"

"To send Ayisha to command them."

I laughed.

"She'll be a safer bet than Jael ever was," said I, "as long as she thinks there's a chance of her becoming Mrs. Jimgrim."

But he smiled back like a chess-player who can see about nine moves ahead.

"Jael kids herself she's dangerous," he said. "But I allow she'll watch her step on account of her fifty thousand pounds. And the Lion will watch his for the same reason. Besides, I'm counting on that sore neck to take the pep out of him. Prospects aren't so gloomy.

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"What do you say to our setting those camels an example? Is breakfast ready?"

"See here, James Schuyler Grim," I answered. "You're a darned good man, and I like you, and all that. But suppose you come across for once. Narayan Singh is a soldier; he'll obey orders and ask no questions; but I'm neither built nor trained that way. Doesn't it seem to you like good sense to take me into confidence?"

"Haven't I?" he asked, raising his eyebrows in obviously genuine surprize. "Seems to me I've trusted you till it's become a kind of habit."

"Have I failed you," I retorted, "that you can't give me at least an outline of your plan now?"

"Oh, is that the trouble?"

He seemed suddenly relieved.

"Why, no; that doesn't seem like sense to me. My plan might be no good. If that's so, I can change it. But if I tell it to you now, you're going to bear it in mind, and if any unforeseen contingency crops up you're going to be governed by the plan I outlined and maybe act in some way so that I shall have to follow up—which might be mighty inconvenient.

"But as long as you don't know what I'm contemplating you're not limited by it, any more than I'm limited by having to consult you before making a sudden change. We'd be like two fellows trying to play one poker hand."

"I should think you could give me a general idea."

"The general idea is to get in touch with the Avenger now and bluff him."

"I know that, of course. But along what line? What general principle?"

"I wonder if you'd mind not pressing that?" he answered. "Let's have this clear. It isn't you I don't trust, it's myself. The thought that I wasn't absolutely free at any minute to turn my whole plan bottomside up, or discard it and try another one, would rattle me so I'd make mistakes.

"I haven't a secret you can't know; but I hate to tell a man something I don't know for sure; I'd feel sort of weak and helpless afterward. It's my fault, not yours; I'm built that way. If it isn't doing right by you, I beg pardon and ask you to be tolerant."

Well, I don't know that I liked it any better at the time, but I saw his point. I have got so since that I never think of pinning him down to an outline of his plan in any undertakings; and the method works well, although—and perhaps because—it calls for every ounce of zeal. You're on the jump the whole time. Not knowing what he's going to do next, you're like an infielder with three on bases.

But he has to choose his men discreetly. There are plenty of men more useful than myself, for instance, who wouldn't stand his reticence for a day. On the other hand, I never knew a man less prone to find fault than he is, or one more superbly tolerant of others' shortcomings.

A LITTLE more than an hour after dawn, while the desert was still cool, Narayan Singh and I set off together on the two best camels. I don't doubt I was still humping a grouch, and Narayan Singh divined the reason of it.

"By the bones in these hills," he laughed, "this is better sport than serving with the army, *sahib!* A soldier in the ranks such as I have ever been, and such as I am like to be again, unless our fate overtakes us all on this adventure, is told nothing—knows nothing—is nothing. He obeys. If a fool of an officer marches him face first into ——, there is not even the satisfaction of a sort of explanation.

"Scouting for the army is rather better fun; but it is very little that a man finds out, and oftener than not that little is ignored; at the best, that one little scrap of information is but added to the mass like a grain of sand into a bushel of the stuff. Neither may a man scout as he would like to, but only as another wills. Whereas with Jimgrim——"

"Oh, shut up!" I growled. "I'm not here to be preached at."

"In an army, *sahib*, there would be much damning and very little preaching," he answered. "Whereas with Jimgrim, though he tells us precious little, we are free like hounds to draw the coverts for him, and there is neither leash nor whip.

"*Il hamdul'illah*, as these heathen say, that Jimgrim is a prince of huntsmen, who knows when a good hound bays on a true scent. But an army had too many huntsmen, who talk among themselves, saying, 'Yes, sir, No, sir,' and then command the pack with a: 'Lo! The General Staff decrees that the scent lies yonder in that

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direction; therefore make haste to find it and bark loud!'

"This Jimgrim would have been a king if his mother had borne him on this side of the Atlantic. Are there others like him in America?"

Well, I grew good-tempered gradually, if for no other reason than because it was absurd to find fault with a man who could arouse such enthusiasm in a follower. Besides, I like Grim; and it's one of my fundamental articles of marrow-bone religion that if I'm a man's friend he may get away with anything except black treason.

But leaving all that out of the reckoning, I defy any man to start off in the morning on a camel alongside Narayan Singh, with friends behind and the unknown just beyond the shimmering horizon, and retain a grouch for twenty minutes.

The hot wind wasn't due for an hour or two. The wound made by Ayisha's dagger in my leg didn't hurt more than was tolerable. The camels were feeling the effects of good corn and thorn-twigs, and went swinging along as if their legs were hung on springs. As long as you haven't got to spend your whole life in the desert, it's about the easiest of all earth's wonders to admire; and the secret of contentment lies in everlastingly admiring something—or so I've found it.

The Sikh began singing some sort of hymn set to minor music; and, though singing in the Jat-Punjabi dialect is one of those accomplishments that were omitted when my kit was tossed out of the great Quartermaster's store, I've always found a curious satisfaction, akin to inspiration, in listening to songs in the vernacular of other lands. Indian lyrics always seem to lose the note of plaintiveness when you translate them, just as Homer's verses lose their roll done into English, and the odes of Horace forced into another tongue come through without their humor:

"In the hot night my mother bore me,
  Knowing not who I am!
Into the dawn I came, a man-child,
Knowing not the life before me,
Stranger to the folk about me.
  None knew who I am!
Out of the book of signs and wonders,
  Knowing not who I am,
Soothsayers read this and that thing.
There is lightning when it thunders;
Do they know the lightning's *karma?*
  None knew who I am!
Out of her heart my mother taught me
  (Stranger, nevertheless!)
Fear and faith and law and legend,
Weeping when my *karma* caught me
Willing yet unwilling—tore me
  Loose from her caress.
Smiled the Powers then at the stripling
  Facing first duress,
Making boast of all that might be,
Choosing pleasant ways and crippling
Choice for sake of this or that one
  (Strangers, nevertheless!)
Thrice and again my *karma* took me
  (None knew who I am!)
Rolling me in red disaster
Till the light o' loves forsook me
And I cried to careless heavens,
  Asking who I am!
Long were the nights I spent in anguish,
  Thinking gods would care,
Vowing I myself would hardly
Leave a thing I made to languish;
If I perished who would profit,
How, and when, and where?
Then I struck a rock, demanding
Why it towered there,
And, as if the rock made answer,
Dawned upon my understanding
'That is His affair!'
Then I looked from rock and river
  To horizon far,
Eying with a new contentment,
Seeing gifts but not the Giver,
  Sun and moon and star,
Stream and forest, time and season,
Fish and bird and beast and man;
None could look into their reason,
  None knew what they are!
So there burst illumination
  Dissipating fears,
And I sang a song of manhood,
And I laughed at the negation
  That is affluent of tears,
Is the sun too long a-borning?
  Are the planets in arrears?
Who am I? Whoever knows me
Is the Monarch of the Morning,
Is the Lord of love and laughter,
  Is the Owner of the years!"

You hardly expect a sporadically dissolute enlisted Sikh to sing that kind of song. But, as the missionaries say, the Sikhs are heathen, and on their way to ——; so we, who don't believe that laughter and religion and the morning are all one, and who think we know exactly who we are, mustn't judge them too harshly.

Personally I'm not much of a dogmatist. Having pitched my tent in —— a lot of times, I'm not so scared as I used to be. And if there's a worse —— than I've camped in yet, as long as there are Sikhs there like Narayan Singh I don't believe I'm going to worry much. They'll sing songs, and we'll find a way out somehow.

I have told only part of Narayan Singh's

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song that he trolled that morning in a rather nasal barytone, because the censor would object to about two-thirds of it. The East is peculiarly frank in some matters that the West prefers to keep behind a veil of mystery, and there were details concerning lights o' love that were interesting, whatever else they might be.

I got to thinking about India, and the fact, admitting of no dispute, that during all the uncontrollable devilry of the Indian Mutiny of '57 there wasn't a single instance of mistreatment of an Englishwoman by the sepoys. So I asked him about Ayisha wondering just how far he proposed to go with his mock love-making.

"Would she make a good wife for a soldier?" I suggested.

To my surprize, instead of laughing he meditated for several minutes before answering. Then:

"The world has this marriage business upside down," he said at last. "A woman is either ambitious, and drives a man as Jael drives the Lion of Petra; or else she is a parasite, who halves his joys and multiplies his sorrows. Single, she is sometimes a delight; married, she is torment.

"As for men: Well, *sahib*, our Jimgrim and you and I are single men. I have not heard him or you complain of it. Nor you me. I have nine piasters and my freedom; show me the woman that can rob me of either!"

But I was still curious. He had not told me yet what I wanted to know.

"She's in an awkward position," I said "What do you suppose is in store for her?"

"Awkward? How so?" he answered. "At the mercy of our seventeen thieves, she would be a baggage to be bought and sold. But there are three of us who would not see her brought to a bad end. Ayisha is like all women; she thinks she has me at her feet, and so despises me, to my no small comfort. She despairs of Jimgrim, and therefore idolizes him, to his discomfort. And she has a woman's luck; for if I know anything, it is that Jimgrim will contrive good fortune for her."

"You think he's the executive of destiny?"

"All men are weapons in the hand of destiny. I am a sepoy—a number on a muster-roll; yet, counting all, I have slain in my day seven-and-thirty men with cold steel. Was that not destiny?

"I was born on the bank of the Jumna. I have killed men near the Ganges, near the Kabul River, near the Irrawaddy, near the Seine, near the Marne, near the Rhine—Pathans, Afghans, Hindus, Burmese, Prussians, Saxons, Austrians—having no personal quarrel with any one of them. And here, near the Jordan, I have slain two Syrians and an Egyptian—all with cold steel. Was that not destiny?

"And am I alone the tool of destiny? Each of us is like a pebble, *sahib*, dropped into a pool, causing rings of ripples that we can not check. I am not in the secret of destiny, but I know this: That our Jimgrim is causing a ripple that will set Ayisha on her feet."

"So you don't plan to make a ripple in her life?" I asked him.

"There is no need," he answered. "Besides, I am a man of few plans. My trade is obedience to orders; and as for amusement I ask no better than a day like this one, with not too many orders, and the unknown waiting to be considered, fifty or a hundred yards ahead."

Well, I don't want to be a Sikh, but I can't beat that for philosophy.

The hot wind started and made further talk impossible with any degree of comfort, for we had to cover our faces. But he had given me plenty to think about, and the man who can't find entertainment in his own thoughts is in a bad way.

I suppose we rode three miles in silence—making eight or nine from our starting-point—before anything happened to break the desert spell. Then, in proof that reflection did not limit our faculties, we both spoke suddenly at once.

"*Dekkol*" said he.

"*Shuf!*" said I.

And we both meant the same thing—

"Look!"

MORE than a score of mounted camels were standing in a group on the horizon, cut off from us by a deep ravine that looked impassable. It seemed as if the men who rode them were holding a consultation; it was a fair guess that they had only just reached the spot. We halted and watched them.

After a minute or two they spread out into a long line, and began to come forward at a walk toward the ravine, constantly increasing the distance between them fanwise, as if scouting. But some of them were not

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very good scouts, or else the sun was too strong in their eyes, for it was quite a while before most of them saw us.

The first to spot us was a man near the middle of the line, but he made no signal to the others. I knew he had seen us, because he put on speed and slightly changed direction. He rode a nearly white camel—it looked all white at that distance.

"I would know that beast in a hundred thousand!" said Narayan Singh.

That was maybe an exaggeration. We have most of us known men who could pick one horse out of a mob infallibly at the first glance. I have seen cow-men do the same thing with a steer. But camels? Nevertheless, it did look like the Syrian beast that Ali Baba rode, and the action of its rider, forcing the pace, as he did, alone, did not quite suggest an enemy.

It became obvious presently that whoever he was he did not know the lie of the land very intimately. He had to halt at the edge of the ravine and stare under his hand to left and right in search of a place where he could cross.

"That's our old thief," said Narayan Singh in a tone of finality. "If we find a place on this side, and he on that, we shall meet the sooner."

He led off without a word, and it began to look as if we might meet our man in the bed of the ravine without the others being any wiser. But as soon as we got in motion half a dozen of them saw us and shouted to the rest, who whipped to a gallop and headed instantly all in one direction, where the top of a negotiable track lay hidden from our view beyond a bulge in the far wall of the ravine.

At that old Ali Baba halted until they had all passed him, and then suddenly began to ride full-pelt the other way. He still made no signal to us, but kept close to the edge of the ravine, and was obviously looking for another crossing higher up. So we followed suit, looking for a track on our side, and what with the irregular curve of the ravine and the speed at which all were moving we soon had several miles between us and the score or so who probably believed that Ali Baba was still with them.

We had long ceased to hear their shouts in the distance when we found a dangerous descent at last and forced our reluctant camels to risk their necks down it. It was more like a goat's ladder than a road, but it was evidently used at times by men, for Ali Baba came on its corresponding opening on his side, and took his chance too. It wasn't merely dangerous going; the heat of the ravine came up to meet us like fumes off the lid of Tophet, seeming to singe your eyelids, and the camels behaved as if they felt the same vertigo that we did.

A camel is a fool at down-hill work in any case; he sticks his supercilious nose in the air and paws about with his forefoot as if expecting somebody to come and put a cushion under it; and if there isn't anything to step on he just yells, and steps on nothing, and lets it go at that. When he lands by luck and ignorance on something solid, he doesn't know enough to stand there for a breath or two and get his balance, but yells again and goes careering on his way like a devil with the hornets after him. So we had some exciting intervals before we reached the bottom.

The heat down there was so intense that you could hardly see or think. It was one of those infernos that geologists pretend were sucked out by running water two or three hundred million years ago. Knowing no more geology than most prospectors and not believing half of that, I prefer to think with the Arabs and Narayan Singh that the devil made that place when he slid on his belly for the home plate after stealing two bases in Eden.

It was full of rocks and rugged islands, and several minutes passed before we caught sight of our old friend, who was hunting for us as nervously as we were for him. Even then, there was such a dancing heat-haze in the valley bottom that we had to look three times before we were sure it was he.

The old man knew us all right. He made his camel kneel, and waited for us in a hollow, over whose rim a man could not be seen standing from twenty paces off.

"*Il hamdul'illah!*" he exclaimed as soon as we got near him. "It is true that Allah makes all things easy, though an old man's bones rebel against this kind of work. Ay-yee! But my loins ache! How fares Jimgrim?"

I told him most of what had happened, while he leaned against his camel's rump and munched dry dates, spitting out the stones between my feet; but I said nothing about that wrestling-bout with Mujrim.

"*Taibl*" he said at last. "If the she-wolf Jael is in Petra, we lambs have a

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chance left for our lives. What do you think? That old village-raider Ibrahim ben Ah, who waits where he was bidden wait, vows he will not stir another inch toward Abu Lissan—nay, not for fifty Ali Higgs! The Avenger is on the move, and none knows which direction he is taking.

"Ibrahim is so afraid that he would not let me go without twenty men—an escort as he pretended, but a guard as a matter of fact—to prevent me from betraying him. Now they will be hunting for me in this *wady*, and I must be gone before they discover me. Go you two to Ibrahim ben Ah instead of me, while I take the news to Jimgrim."

"Did Yussuf get through with his letter?" I asked.

"No. They caught him. He had it in mind to sell that letter of Jimgrim's. He swore there was a draft in it for fifty thousand pounds, and he offered to trade the lot for ten good camels.

"But they took the letter from him, being brigands, whereas he was but a sneak-thief; and when they opened it and found only a letter in English and a second envelope containing nothing, then they knew him for the liar I said he was."

"Did they read the letter?" I asked.

"No, none could read it. But he offered to read it for them; and, judging his life to be in danger, he told such a tale about Jimgrim and Jael and Ali Higg as set them all well by the ears.

"But the fool wasn't clever enough to stick to the truth. He told such a cock-and-bull story that they could make neither head nor tail of it, and when they asked me I laughed.

"So he denounced me, saying I was party to the tricking of Ali Higg, and what with one thing and another Ibrahim ben Ah was at his wits' end, knowing not what to believe. I thought he would kill the two of us, and was not pleased, for, *inshallah*, I can die a better death than in one halter with a dog like Yussuf.

"But Allah makes all things easy. Ibrahim decided at last to obey the order in the letter that I brought, seeing that the seal was on it, and to take us both along with him."

"I will stick that pig Yussuf when I find him!" swore Narayan Singh. "By the Prophet's body and my beard, he shall learn how a knife in the belly feels!"

"Too late to teach him that," laughed Ali Baba. "You would have to fight the vultures for his belly. His head lies one way, and his limbs the other.

"There came two men from different directions. Ibrahim knew both of them, and knew they would not dare lie to him. The one said that Ali Higg, with Jael and Ayisha and a score of men, was camped in a *fiumara* not far off. The other said that a certain Jimgrim—a person much resembling Ali Higg in general appearance, even to the bandage on his neck—was prowling to the south of us, also with twenty men.

"That was so contrary to Yussuf's story that, considering his gold earrings and the army pistol and the camel-trappings—nor forgetting the lie about the draft for fifty thousand pounds—it was decided on the spot that the earth would be well rid of him. He begged like a city thief, and chattered a lot more lies, but they tore him between camels and hé talked no more."

"Killed him for his earrings, eh?" said I, not exactly relishing the prospect of a visit to that gang.

"Aye, but I have the earrings," the old fox answered, and showed them in the hollow of his hand.

Well, it doesn't take much to make you laugh on some occasions. Most of us have giggled in church or at a funeral. The thought of that old rascal being clever enough to steal such loot in the circumstances under the eyes of a hundred and forty bandits was a straw that tickled overstrung nerves past control.

Narayan Singh and I sat back on our camels' rumps and roared with laughter until the tears came. I believe old Ali Baba thought us mad; there was nothing remarkable about the incident to him, barring professional pride.

"What does this mean about Jimgrim and Ali Higg?" he asked when we left off laughing for lack of breath. "What does the sore Lion think he will accomplish by calling himself Jimgrim?"

But we could not enlighten him on that score, and he shook his head forebodingly.

"If this were my expedition, by Allah, I would call it off!" he exclaimed. "The thieves are too much disturbed for an honest man to make a profit. I like the thought of El-Kalil.

"However, those dogs of Ibrahim ben Ah's will catch me unless I hurry. Go ye to Ibrahim with them, and tell him any tale

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you please, so be you keep them off my trail until I reach our Jimgrim. Hark! I hear their voices."

HE WAS up and away with astonishing agility, riding at top speed up the ravine in search of a better track to escape by. I think if I had been alone I would have followed him, for it didn't look like wisdom or necessity to take tea just then with Ibrahim ben Ah. Our old fox had the news, and until Grim had a chance to pass judgment on it there was nothing much to be gained that I could see by running further risks.

But though I've often met men who pretended to no yellow streak, and have sometimes envied their ability to fool themselves, I'm disagreeably aware of a phase of fear that has got me into more tight places at different times than I care to recall. Perfectly aware of what was actuating me, I didn't care, nevertheless, to appear afraid before Narayan Singh.

"We'd better get a move on," I suggested.

He eyed me sharply once, and whatever his own thought process was, I'm pretty sure he was aware of mine.

"Why not?" he answered, laughing. "As our old king of thieves keeps on saying, 'Allah makes all things easy!' "

So we rode side by side down the *wady* to meet Ibrahim's men, and they weren't pleased when they came on us and were assured that old Ali Baba had given them the slip. They swore outrageously. Their fear of returning without the old man provided an uncomfortable insight into the character of the other old man we would presently be forced to meet.

But swearing did not get them anywhere, and to have killed us on the spot, much though that would have suited their temper, might have got them into even worse trouble with their irascible commander. They were as tough a crowd of hard-faced cutthroats as ever praised Allah thrice a day, and they hadn't a camel between them that was half as good as either of our two.

So when they had failed by dint of threats to extort from us the slightest hint as to the direction old Ali Baba had taken they made up their minds to do the next best thing and ordered us to trade camels with them. But I think I've hinted once or twice that I like to make a profit on most transactions. I like to swing my strength into anything that comes along, take my chances with the next man, and get well paid for it.

There was nothing that appealed to me in the suggestion to trade two magnificent Syrian riding-camels for a couple of mangy baggage-beasts, especially since the good ones did not belong to me in any case. So I waxed exceeding wrathy. Long experience has taught me to be slow-spoken in anger, giving each abusive word full room and weight, in a voice like a good top-sergeant's to an awkward squad.

"In the name of the Prophet, on whom be peace," I thundered, "I can smite nine or ten such dogs as you! As many of you as are left afterward can return to Ibrahim ben Ah and tell him you met two friends of the Lion of Petra, who proved that jackals are no match for them!

"Come on!" said I. "Try to take the camels. Ye call yourselves the Lion's followers. Alley-dogs! Eaters of ullage! Try what the Lion's friends are like!"

A speech like that might not get you farther than the hospital, if you tried it in a railway round-house in the States, or even on a soap-box, say, on Fourteenth Street, New York, where the rag-tag and bob-tail of the universe foregather. But in the desert, where every contour of the landscape is a threat that must be taken seriously—and above all in a company whose leader's threats mean business—the voice of arrogance is likelier listened to than argument or whining.

Add to that that we were two big men, well armed—that my shaven head and sprouting beard suggested the *darwaish* and a form of religious sanctity—that we hadn't betrayed the slightest inclination to run away at any stage in the proceedings—and you can judge their predicament. They had their choice between calling the bluff or mending their manners; and the latter, being easiest, they chose it.

On top of that I turned another trick, as old as politics. If you want at least the appearance of obedience, order a man to do what he wants to do. Knowing what they wanted, I didn't give them time to make demands, but announced mine high-handedly.

"Lead the way to Ibrahim ben Ah!" I commanded, and then added for the sake of sweet amenity, "Let us see what he has to tell us about changing camels!"

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The situation was reversed forthwith. They began to be very friendly—almost obsequious. They addressed me as "your honor," and Narayan Singh as "prince," he being ostensibly a Pathan, a nation that does not run to princes, but likes flattery almost as much as fighting.

But they took the precaution of placing us in their midst before starting out of that infernal *wady*, and there were moments while we made the difficult ascent when it was mighty comforting to know that Narayan Singh was on the camel next behind. He has eyes in the back of his head.

Once out of the ravine we lit out for the horizon at a clip too fast for conversation; and when they wanted to halt half-way and ask me questions I refused. Our destination was a low, long, flat-topped hill scattered with boulders that looked like warts on the back of a rhinoceros. The green of a few date palms at the right-hand end announced an oasis and the water that constitutes the key to all desert strategy. Whoever holds the wells commands that situation, and can oblige his adversary to fight in that place first.

We slowed down as we drew near the encampment, and Narayan Singh poured out the vials of his military scorn, compared to which the scorn of one religious sect for another is as mere nursery stuff.

"Who could make a nation of such people!" he exclaimed. "Not a picket! Not an outpost! Not a sentry marking the camp limit! No wonder a tribe is strong one year and paying tribute the next. The very pickpockets of India know better than to sleep without mounting a guard."

But in spite of his contempt we were seen from a long way off, and although there was no guard turned out to receive us, the word had been passed to the commander several minutes before we reached the camp that two strangers were being brought in.

He was the only one who had a tent—pretty obviously a stolen one, for it bore all the earmarks of the U. S. Near East Relief Commission. He did not come outside it to receive us. We could see him from a quarter of a mile away, seated on a pile of cushions, looking like an Old Testament king with his iron-gray beard and long robes.

As soon as we came within range of his eyes through the open tent-front our escort tried to stage what the armies call "eye-wash," but failed to get away with it. They closed in on us, seeking to give the impression that we were prisoners. However, eye-wash, which is after all but the name of a sub-species of bluff, was all that Narayan Singh and I had to depend on; so we halted promptly, and used our tongues and camel-sticks.

"Fathers of a bad smell!" I roared at them. "Shall we approach Ibrahim ben Ah stinking like unwashed village-dogs? Keep clear of us! Keep behind!"

And because of the likelihood of retribution if they should be seen handling us roughly, in the possible event of our finding favor, they obeyed and hauled off.

So we rode alone in advance, looking more like officers of a platoon than prisoners. The bivouac was made at the foot of the northern slope of the hill, with the camels lying in irregular lines all about a row of three deep wells, whose masonry gleamed in the fierce sunlight between thrifty date-palms.

Most of the men were sprawling here and there on mats. Some had made shelters of their prayer-mats propped on short sticks, and there was one long shed that would hold thirty or forty men made by spreading mats on poles across the heaped-up camel-loads. They had plenty of baggage with them—mainly stuff to eat—but the loads were all intact and ready to be moved at a moment's notice.

Whether for sake of example, or by way of humor, or as a hint to strangers, or as a practical-artistic means of establishing the limit of the bivouac, they had stuck Yussuf's head on a spear-point, and the ghastly, sightless thing leered at us as we rode by. There was no sign of the other remnants of him.

I never got over feeling squeamish about that kind of thing, and the feeling of more or less confidence that I had raised in myself by brow-beating the escort petered out pretty badly. Narayan Singh didn't appear to mind the gruesome spectacle, but feelings in concrete instances like that are individual, and his indifference failed to impart itself to me. His own may have been assumed for all I know.

The escort shouted to us to dismount and approach Ibrahim ben Ah respectfully on foot—which would have placed us in the attitude of inferiors. It is none of my intention to challenge Holy Writ, and the

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meek may inherit the earth with no impediment from me, but I maintain there are occasions when meekness is dangerous weakness.

Besides, I don't like abject salutations when addressed to me. Mistrusting, as I invariably do, any man who shows me too much outward respect, it's no less than reasonable to reverse that and hold my chin as high as I expect the other fellow to. Anyway I've always done it, and I did so then.

We rode straight up to Ibrahim ben Ah's tent and let our camels kneel before dismounting. Then in our own good time, Narayan Singh taking his cue from me out of the corner of his eye, we gave the desert greeting that is solemn, stately, dignified, raising our hands to our foreheads as we bowed.

"*Salamun alaik!*" said I.

"*Wa alaik issalam!*" answered Ibrahim ben Ah.

Greeting and answer both meant "Peace!" So thus far all was well.

CHAPTER VII

"Akbar Ali Higg!"

THE last time we set eyes on Ibrahim ben Ah was in the desert on the way to Petra, on the occasion of our capturing Jael, when he strode into our midst at midnight to receive orders from Grim, whom he supposed in the darkness to be Ali Higg, and strode away again without comment.

It was likely he knew neither of us by sight, for he can't have had more than a sidewise glimpse of either of us in the always tricky moonlight; but I would have known him in any circumstances, for he was one of those rare individuals who leave their impress ineradicably on your mind, unlike Grim, who seems to have the useful gift of fading, so that every time you see him after an interval you remark something unexpected about him that seems new.

You can't forget what Grim has done, nor how he did it, although it's difficult to describe him because his features are not easy to recall. You could very easily forget what Ibrahim ben Ah had done, and his methods were too crude and cruel to possess the slightest novelty; but you couldn't forget his face and general appearance if you tried for twenty years.

He was a handsome old fellow, with the venerable aspect rather spoiled by the breadth of his nose and the cold acquisitiveness of keen blue eyes. You expected them to be brown, and it was rather a shock when you saw they weren't.

Most men look smaller when seated, especially if the seat is a mat or a pile of cushions, but not so he. The position merely increased his dignity.

He wore quite a lot of jewelry, including several diamond rings that called attention to the great size of his shapely hands, which were wrinkled and brown, but strong as iron. Most of his garments, except the striped outer cloak, were of silk, but, unlike most of his men, who wore plundered boots of every conceivable pattern, his bare, brown feet were shod only with open sandals.

He had the usual allowance of two bandoleers, a British service rifle, a revolver and two knives in sight; and they were probably only a suggestion of the armory he kept hidden from view in the ample folds of his cloak. When he moved there was a suggestive clink of hardware.

On the whole, I am inclined to think his main secret of command was hypnotic; he was so used to the receipt and execution of ruthless orders, and so bent on being obeyed that authority exuded from him like an aura. I made up my mind right away that to humor him would only tickle his vanity.

His men were within easy hail, and ten or twelve ruffians were standing almost within earshot; but inside the tent there were two of us to one of him, and if there was going to be any high-handed business I had a notion who would be first to regret it. Instead of waiting for him to speak first and standing respectfully in front of him, as ninety-nine Indians out of any hundred would have done, I squatted down on the floor-mat, motioned to Narayan Singh to do the same, and opened on him with an awkward question.

"What is this tale we hear?" I demanded. "Ali Higg sends us to find Ali Baba. Ali Baba tells us that you are afraid to advance on Abu Lissan. What does it mean?"

He was dumfounded. There were probably not more than three people in the world who had dared to question him like that for several years past.

"Where is Ali Baba, and who are you that ask such a question?" he demanded after a long pause.

"Ali Baba," said I, "is obeying orders,

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conveyed from the Lion himself by me to him. He has gone back to tell the Lion all that he has seen and heard. As to who I am—*Mashallah!* Are the Lion's envoys called in question?"

"You are a stranger to me," he retorted.

"Not so," said I. "I was with the Lion on the night when he ordered you to that oasis on the way to El-Maan. I am the *hakim* who healed his boils. This other is my servant. I am a *darwaish* from Lahore, well versed in such matters as pertain to the offsetting of greater force by strategy and cunning. Therefore I am now employed by Ali Higg to aid him in confounding the Avenger."

"Cunning?" he said, with the suggestion of a wry smile. "You look more like a bold man than a cunning one. Let us hope you are the father of deceit, for as surely as this right hand strikes my left, not the Prophet himself could have prevailed in his day against such numbers as we have against us!"

He suited action to the word by bringing down his right fist into his left palm with a loud clap.

As I have said several times, I am no strategist. That trick would have got by me. But Narayan Singh was too alert for him, and before the nearest men could come running in answer to the signal Ibrahim ben Ah's cold old eyes were staring disconcertedly straight down the muzzle of a Webley revolver.

All the odds were dreadfully against us except one, but that lone one outweighed the rest. In common with the normal run of men old Ibrahim ben Ah was unprepared to die, and something in his inner consciousness convinced him—accurately as it happened—that Narayan Singh would pull the trigger, and not miss, unless he sent the men away as swiftly as he had sumomned them.

I was afraid for a second that he was going to be too late, in which case I suppose this story would never have been told, although Ibrahim ben Ah and half a dozen others would certainly have preceded us to hammer at the gates of Kingdom Come. The old rascal was so surprized that words stuck in his throat, and I drew my own repeating pistol in readiness to make a last stand alongside Narayan Singh. But Ibrahim barked out an order in the nick of time, and almost at the tent-door the men halted, and turned away without having seen what was happening because the Sikh's broad back was turned toward them.

Ibrahim ben Ah screwed up a smile that showed the gold caps on his eye-teeth when the men were once more out of ear-shot and Narayan Singh lowered the revolver.

"Ye act like men who are afraid!" he sneered. "Ye fear without cause. By Allah, I am a man who is well served, and if my men mistake a chance noise for a summons, that is no reason why honest men should tremble for their lives."

But if any one was trembling it was he, and not with fear but anger almost too intense to be suppressed. Having won the upper hand of him mainly through Narayan Singh's presence of mind, it was up to us to hold it, and about as certain as anything well could be that the old man would reverse the situation at the first chance.

"I asked a question that you haven't answered yet," said I. "By the Prophet's feet, this is a fine reception for the Lion's messengers! A strange tale we shall have to tell him!"

"Aye!" he croaked, moving his Adam's apple several times in rapid succession as he choked down his rising passion. "A very strange tale, on top of stranger happenings: I would like to see how Ali Higg with twenty men can make me move with a hundred, four and forty!

"First it was toward the British border I was sent, to raid El-Maan, which was feasible; there is loot there for the taking. Then I was told to cool my heels in that oasis. Now it is to march on Abu Lissan, where we have no chance at all, and I am sick of the changing orders from day to day.

"By Allah, who am I to be ordered about like a bought slave? And who in the name of the Prophet is Ali Higg that he should play fast and loose with me? I will *not* march on Abu Lissan, and that is all about it!"

I laughed. I couldn't think of anything to say for the moment. If Ali Higg's main force was going to mutiny, I didn't see that Grim had much chance left of checkmating the Avenger and restoring a kind of order on the countryside. My main trouble is that I think too slowly to be of much use in a crisis of that kind; but Narayan Singh stepped nobly into the breach.

"By Allah's Prophet and my teeth!" he boomed out.

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"Say thy prayers, Ibrahim! These men who obey thee at a hand-clap shall choose between thee and a woman presently!"

"Jael has returned to Petra," he answered rather smugly.

Narayan Singh had Ayisha in mind, not Jael; but here was a new note in the discord. Evidently Jael had got word to Ibrahim by one of those three messengers who brought news to Ayisha in the night; and Ibrahim had drawn his own conclusions.

I SAW clearly now the strength of Grim's contention in refusing to divulge his plans. If he had outlined any definite course for us to follow I would have felt bound by it; whereas I was free to use my own judgment as it was.

If Ibrahim ben Ah had determined, as seemed possible, to desert with all his force to the Avenger rather than run the risk of defeat, we stood confronted with a fine kettle of fish. The Avenger would be free, for one thing, to establish himself as paramount chief of all that district; success would breed success; next he might capture El-Kerak—perhaps Es-Salt as well—and raid like a whirlwind into Palestine with thousands of loot-hungry malcontents.

From my own personal standpoint I wouldn't have worried much if the Avenger should accomplish all those things, for sooner or later he would be brought to bay and smashed by the British army. It didn't seem to me that the price of U. S. Government securities would be affected.

But I was set like any decent member of a team on seeing Grim win out. You can't like a man and not do your darnedest to help him win the game, even if it isn't your game exactly. And my game, too, it was, to the extent that Narayan Singh's life and mine were teetering in the balance.

You can't explain thought processes, or at any rate I can't. Something takes place inside your tympanum, and you act or speak. If the gray stuff functions neatly, you say or do the right thing; then you're a wise one. If it doesn't, the temporary lessees of other sorts of cerebellums describe you afterward as a fool or a poor fish, while some one cashes in on the insurance and the undertaker makes another entry in his ledger.

So don't put me down as a psychologist, for I'm only guessing when I say that keenness on the job has a lot to do with inspiration. To state a case with proper caution, "I've observed" that when you're really keen to help another man, you're more likely to do the right thing than the wrong one, even in the dark.

"Have you heard about Jimgrim?" I asked him, and the question went straight as a bullet into the very center of his perplexity.

So I'm a wise one, even though I did shoot at a venture.

"Heard of him? May Allah change his face!" he snarled. "Aye, I have heard of him. What do you know of him? What is he doing, prowling the desert with twenty men, and sending me messages? They say he resembles Ali Higg, even to the wrappings on his neck. What is his purpose?"

"Tell me what message he sent you, and perhaps I can answer," said I.

"He sent word to me at dawn today to run no risks, but to wait in this place until he shall speak with the Avenger. What does that mean?"

It obviously meant that the Lion of Petra, pretending to be Grim—even as Grim was pretending to be the Lion of Petra—was venturing on the risky course of trading on Grim's reputation. How he could hope to escape being recognized by the Avenger, whose face he boasted of having spoiled, was past imagining; but it was easy to understand why he should want to keep Ibrahim ben Ah inactive until he should have a chance to try the trick.

"What does his impudence mean?" Ibrahim repeated.

But I am too old a bird to be caught airing my knowledge at the first request. Information, like hard cash, is for use, not squandering.

"Why didn't you catch him and find out?" I asked.

"*Wallahi!* If I could have caught him I would have flayed the fool alive! I sent twoscore men after him, but he was gone. Does the Lion know about him?" he asked with sudden suspicion. "Is Ali Higg employing him to make terms with the Avenger?"

But I hedged again. If I could keep Ibrahim ben Ah from deserting to the other side by stimulating doubt, that looked like good business.

"I am in the Lion's confidence," said I. "Tell me what you know of Jimgrim; then—dates in exchange for rice, camels for

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horses, sheep for wheat—if the trade looks good I will tell what I know in return."

"Jimgrim," he said slowly, speaking through his teeth as a man does when he mentions sacrilege or anything else that he detests, "is an Amiricani, an infidel, who has been to Mecca, to my knowledge, in disguise. He was useful to Feisul and Lawrence in the great war, when we Arabs defeated the Turks, and the Allies took the credit and the plunder. He is a bold man, with the cunning of a hundred. And he once saved a day for Saoud the Avenger by getting camels for him when the Turks had captured most of the Avenger's beasts."

"So if Jimgrim should get to the Avenger's ear he might listen on the score of friendship?" I suggested.

"*Wallahi!* That might be. The point is, what will Jimgrim say to the Avenger?"

I nodded; but I knew that wasn't the point. If there was one dead certainty on earth, it was that the Lion of Petra, whether or not disguised as Grim, would never dare trespass into the Avenger's camp, for fear of recognition and the inevitably gruesome death that would certainly follow. An Arab doesn't dub himself "Avenger" and then forgive the mortal enemy detected in the act of tricking him. However, my job seemed to be to keep Ibrahim on tenterhooks.

"Jimgrim is in league with the Lion," I said, quite truthfully.

Following that, I drew hard on imagination.

"Jimgrim's plan," I continued, "is to take camels away from the Avenger for a change. There are men in the Avenger's camp who will desert at Jimgrim's bidding, driving off the camels with them."

And, having known a little frankness on occasion to leaven a prodigious lot of lies, I added—

"The Lion suspects you of intending treachery."

"Allah!" he exclaimed, trying to cover up alarm with a display of indignation.

"By Allah, yes!" said I. "And if Jimgrim should return from Abu Lissan with a couple of hundred of the Avenger's best men, it would fare badly with any traitor in this camp."

At the word traitor the irascible old bandit made a motion as if to draw one of his weapons. But he thought better of it. Narayan Singh's revolver was too obviously pointed straight, and my own pistol was equally in evidence.

The deuce of it was that, though we held him helpless for the moment, the situation was going to be reversed the moment we should try to escape. We could prevent his men from coming to his assistance easily enough, by threatening to shoot him unless he ordered them away again; but either we had got to sit there watching him until we all starved, or until the god of all improbabilities should produce Grim on the scene, or else I had got to take a one-in-a-hundred-thousand chance.

I took a silver five-piaster piece from the purse in the fold of my waist-cloth, and spun it in the air. It fell on the mat tails uppermost. The long chance had it.

"Will you sit here," I said to Narayan Singh, "and keep the old bird company, while I take a turn outside."

Ibrahim ben Ah did not understand a word of that, but he dropped his jaw at hearing me speak English. But surprize gave place to baffled anger as the Sikh answered me in Arabic.

"Surely. I will keep his honor company. Moreover, I speak for his honor Ibrahim, who will sit quietly, as becomes a courteous host, to wait for your return—seeing he is averse to having three holes shot through him with this revolver!" he added meaningly.

Ibrahim ben Ah said never a word. I don't see what there was he could have said. Barring unforseen contingencies, we had him corralled for the moment. I got up and left the tent with the notion first of all of finding out just how far Ibrahim's intention of betraying Ali Higg had taken root among the men.

Seeing one come out leisurely where two had entered, the men who happened to be watching drew no conclusions that troubled them. They lay under their improvised shelters eying me with lazy interest, more curious than suspicious.

There wasn't any of that sullen look about them that most Eastern, and all African, peoples wear when they think of betraying their salt. It was a long shot—the longest I ever risked—but I made up my mind to behave as if I knew they were loyal to the last man to the Lion their master.

Don't forget; I was dressed and shaven for the part of a *darwaish*—the politico-religious fanatic, who is privileged more or less

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to air his opinions on any subject, and whose person is theoretically sacred from assault. No theories are fool-proof, and no *darwaish* should strain his immunity too far, but he has privileges that are more likely to be respected by the ignorant than by their leaders.

There was nothing outrageous, or even surprizing, in my assumption of an air of superior wisdom and arrogance. Besides, coming straight out of Ibrahim's tent, it was presumable that I had his authority for whatever I might say or do. They would reason that he would have ordered me to be beaten or murdered otherwise.

THERE was a big pile of flour-bags in the middle of the bivouac that made a first-class pulpit. I mounted it with as much of an air of frenzy as a man of my temperament can assume without looking foolish, and stood glaring about me until curiosity brought most of them to their feet.

"*Allaho Akbar!*" I roared then at the top of my lungs; and that being a subject on which all Moslems are unanimous, they shouted back at me that God was very great indeed.

The phrase being their favorite war-cry, as well as a statement of doctrine, they began to gather around me. I had my rifle in my right hand, and shook it violently by way of further stimulating curiosity, and in less than two minutes pretty nearly every member of the force was elbowing for standing-room. You couldn't have gathered a crowd more easily in New York City.

When you're broke it's no use figuring on the pile you should have; then's the time to use nickels for all they're worth. And in a desperate situation it isn't any good worrying about what you don't know; the thing is to act on what you do know. Then if circumstances get the upper hand in spite of energy and courage, nobody can blame you. At least, they'll blame you, but they haven't any right to, which is different.

I knew one or two things for a fact. One was that Grim has genius, that he stands by his friends, and that he was keener than anybody on finding a solution of the general mess. Another certainty was that Ali Baba had gone to tell him the facts of the situation.

It wasn't going to help me or anybody else to take into the reckoning just then the possibility of Ali Baba failing to find Grim. That was up to Providence and Ali Baba.

A third indisputable fact was that Grim had stated his intention of putting Ayisha in command of these hundred and forty men. That made three things that I knew, which the men in front of me did not. It didn't look easy to build a compelling argument out of them, but I could try.

And a fourth fact—that they imagined Grim was Ali Higg, and Ali Higg was Grim, but that I knew the truth of the matter—provided an element of confusion, which any professional spell-binder could easily turn to advantage. Not being a trained orator gave me no right to lie down on the job, and I waded in.

"*Allaho Akbar!*" I roared again.

I can bellow like a mad bull on suitable occasion.

"*Allaho Akbar!*" they answered.

We were getting on finely. A common platform was established. It was as if a soap-box orator in Union Square had started his speech by asserting that the Stars and Stripes is a first-class flag; whoever didn't think so in the audience would have to pretend to agree for his hat's sake. There was no fear of opposition now for a minute or two.

"Ye followers of the Lion of Petra," I thundered out, "heroes of the desert—faithful followers of the true Prophet, on whom be peace—I bring word to you from Ali Higg, your leader."

"*Akbar!*" they began to shout.

So I had guessed right. It was only their commander who was disaffected.

I held up the rifle again for silence, and kept them waiting, having often noticed that the pauses are the best part of a speech.

"Ali Higg the terrible, the Lord of the Limits of the Desert and the Waters, has declared against Saoud in the name of Allah. Saoud, who dares to call himself Avenger, shall lie low!"

"*Akbar! Akbar Ali Higg!*" they shouted; for shouting costs nothing in any language, and commits nobody as long as reporters are not present.

"This fellow who calls himself Avenger has eight hundred men," I went on. "But what are numbers? Had the Prophet numbers when he marched against his enemies? Allah makes all things easy!"

"*Allaho Akbar!*" they agreed.

"This Avenger fellow is a jackal, but he

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of Petra is a Lion. And like a lion he has taken to the desert, where cunning and craft win the day against numbers, even as the wind can blow the sand."

I was far from being certain of that simile; but my audience were not pedagogs. They were men who wanted to listen to optimism, and didn't care whether sand or wind resembled a lion's cunning, or otherwise.

"And does a lion hunt in company?" I demanded, glaring about me as if I had propounded a problem such as only a sage could answer. "Nay! He hunts alone! He stalks. He lies in wait. He strikes at the unexpected moment. And who can stand against him? He is terrible in his wrath, and his enemies are confused, not knowing the path he took nor the direction of his coming. Wo, then, to the Lion's enemies!"

That part of the speech had such a good effect on them that I paused again to let the emotion work; and, glaring this and that way with a rolling eye, as I have seen the professionals behave, I got a chance to observe Ibrahim ben Ah's tent. The old man was still sitting in there, cursing steadily, I should say, by the way his beard moved; and Narayan Singh was so well placed that you couldn't possibly tell from outside the tent that he held a cocked revolver in his hand. The two seemed to be deep in conversation.

"But how about the Lion's friends?" I roared as soon as there was perfect silence. "Does he desert them? Never! Does he leave them to their own resources? No! Does he leave them at the mercy of an old man, whose days are numbered, whose marrowless bones might quake at the thought of facing the Avenger? Do ye think that the Lion would do such a thing?"

I paused once more, and as they did not know what was coming they held their breath.

"What think ye of the Lion's wife?"

"Jael! Jael!" they began to shout, and I didn't contradict them.

I didn't dare mention Ayisha yet, because the news of her divorce might possibly have reached them. The main point was to establish the thought in their minds that Ali Higg was going to send a woman deputy to override, and perhaps replace altogether, old Ibrahim ben Ah.

"The Lion's wife knows all his plans," I went on. "She keeps his secrets. She understands the craft with which he hunts. She has courage, and guile, and ability. Are ye afraid to follow a woman? Has a woman never led you to victory?"

They made no secret of the fact that they preferred a woman. Possibly even Jael's discipline was less fierce than Ibrahim ben Ah's or Ali Higg's.

"Good! We will follow his wife!" they shouted.

"He has more than one wife," I countered then. "What does it matter to you which wife he sends?"

They said it made no difference. I think they rather hoped a junior wife would come, whose hand would fall less heavily than Jael's on offenders. They were just as feckless in the hour of uncertainty as any other crowd of men—the usual human mixture of emotions, fierce and sheep-like alternately—accustomed to be led, and consequently afraid of nothing so much as to be left to their own resources.

Can you think of one crowd of rebels since history was written that in a climax wasn't eager for a change of captains? They were still full of confidence in Ali Higg, because he had always held himself as much as possible aloof from them. He was a sort of mystery, who led them once in a while in person on some whirlwind foray, and who imposed his drastic punishments more often than not by deputy. So Ibrahim ben Ah, the deputy, was a weariness to the flesh, while Ali Higg remained a hero in their imaginations.

I dare say that in that minute I could have led a mutiny against Ibrahim ben Ah. It would only have called for a little mouthing of religious platitudes—quotations from the Koran—any of the pabulum with which all agitators fool the crowd into believing it has justice on its side; for you can't do much, even with a crowd of pirates, unless you make them think the issue is a moral one.

But—setting aside the fact that mutinous troops are useless to anybody; and Grim, as far as I understood the situation, wanted a force in being to maneuver against the Avenger—there is something in my make-up that rebels against that sort of thing. It strikes me as playing off-side, and I don't enjoy to win my point, earn money, or resolve a difficulty that way.

To trick an opponent is one thing. To take him by surprize, catch him napping,

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cause him to deceive himself, and, if he is a man of violence, feed him his own medicine, is all in the game, as I see it. But to defeat even a bandit by deliberately stirring mutiny among his men seems to me to put you in the class with propagandists in other people's countries; it's no white man's business.

So I didn't say one word further about Ibrahim ben Ah. For all I cared, and if they chose to submit to it, he might lead them to the devil once that hand was played; that was their affair, and his. Old Ibrahim got much the worst of the transaction; but I'd enjoy to meet him tomorrow and talk the matter over.

That's one of the reasons why Grim and I get on so well together in spite of his uncommunicativeness; I have never known him to play with cards under the table. He plays good poker. He can bluff like a Down-East Yankee, drawing nothing to a pair of jacks and winning by the glitter in his eye. But he plays a white man's game; and I've never known him spiteful.

However, there I was on a pile of flour-bags in the baking sun, wondering what to say next. As I have explained, the bivouac rested in the curve near one end of a boulder-strewn hill. You couldn't see around the corner, but in front and to the left was empty desert, smirched here and there with sand-clouds driven by the scorching wind.

The only men on watch whom I could see were half a dozen posted on the lower end of the spur that cut off the right-hand view, although there may have been one or two others hidden among the boulders on the top of the hill behind me.

For lack of any better entertainment I was about to tell them of the plunder there might be in Abu Lissan, that being a subject that would have amused them without committing me in any way, when I detected symptoms of excitement among the watchers on the spur of the hill to my right. That could only possibly mean that somebody was coming.

The crowd was facing me. I waved my rifle in the direction of the lookout, and they all faced about to see. That gave me time to think, and I thought first of Narayan Singh.

If any one except Grim were coming, the Sikh and I were as good as dead men; for visitors would certainly be taken straight to Ibrahim ben Ah's tent, and you could trust that old opportunist to turn the tables on us promptly at the first chance. We would have to shoot in self-defense, and it would be all over in a minute.

So it wasn't the least use speculating on that contingency. The only possible chance of safety lay in the arrival of Grim, and in his being mistaken for Ali Higg. I must bet on that; and being so constituted that I habitually use the last shot as determinedly as the first one, I went the limit.

"Aho!" I roared. "The Lion of Petra comes! To your camels! I go to tell Ibrahim ben Ah!"

AT THE first suggestion of anything doing the Bedouin thinks of his camel in any case. Each man rushed away to where his beast lay hobbled. They tie a rope around his folded foreleg after the camel has been made to kneel, and that prevents his getting up until the rope is loosed again.

I jumped off the pile of bags and strode, as slowly as I could contrive in the state of excitement I was in, toward Ibrahim ben Ah's tent, where Narayan Singh still sat motionless with his back toward me.

The lookout on the spur began shouting before I was half-way to the tent. I couldn't hear the words, but the men nearest to them did, and passed the news along. Instantly the bivouac was in an uproar, and camels began rising to their feet in twos and threes and dozens as the hobbles were untied.

"*Akbar Ali Higg!*" they roared in greeting. So Grim was coming!

But as I reached the tent old Ibrahim ben Ah seemed to me to be wearing a rather too confident smile for a man in his predicament. I think he counted on a dozen or more men running to the tent with news, in which case we should be overwhelmed. He probably argued that, in view of Ali Higg's arrival, we would hesitate to shoot first.

"Between promise and fulfilment a man may marry off his ugly daughter," is a proverb with which every Arab in extremity consoles himself; and I knew as well as he did that between the moment of Grim's turning the corner of the hill and his reaching the tent a hundred things might happen.

If we should be killed in the interval, whether we were the Lion's friends or not, and whether or not he set high value on us,

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as dead men we should never be able to explain the incident or deny any made-up yarn of Ibrahim's.

So I enlightened him on one point, to begin with. I stood in the tent opening with my pistol leveled straight at him.

"What is written is written," I said, "and none knoweth any outcome before it cometh to pass. But I know this pistol is a good one, and is loaded. If it is written that blood shall flow now, of us three you die first, friend Ibrahim ben Ah!"

He decided to sit still, luckily for him. But it was an uncomfortable minute. There is nothing pleasant about holding a pistol at an old man's head, or in the possible necessity to shoot him, for that matter.

But luckily for us Grim was at the top of his form that morning. He had taken his time about following us across the desert, reserving all his speed for the last lap, when speed and nothing else could count.

There wasn't a chance in a million of his being able to keep up the pretense of being Ali Higg if he lingered among the men, or once came within eye-shot of Ibrahim. He had to pull off one swift, convincing bluff, or else we were all in the discard together.

I got behind Ibrahim ben Ah, so as to see what was going on without losing the upper hand of him. I touched the back of his head with the muzzle of my pistol, and watched as if Babe Ruth were making a home run.

Suddenly Grim swooped around the corner at full gallop, followed by Ali Baba and his sixteen rascals with Ayisha in their midst, and I nodded to Narayan Singh to get to his feet as the bandits shook their rifles in the air and thundered out their greeting—

"Akbar Ali Higg!"

CHAPTER VIII

"Have you heard of Jimgrim?"

GRIM had left no more to chance than was necessary. He had even wrapped his neck with bandages to heighten his resemblance to the Lion; and the lower half of his face being covered for protection against the wind, it was easy enough to mistake his identity.

Another point in his favor was the real Ali Higg's notorious aloofness. It was in keeping with the part that he should halt a hundred yards beyond the limit of the bivouac and wait in solitary grandeur while his men came on to do his bidding.

Nor was it anything remarkable that those accompanying him should be strangers to Ibrahim's command, for unless such a robber chief as Ali Higg can keep on adding fresh parties of marauders to his string he is pretty surely doomed to collapse.

Evidently Grim had left no detail of his plan unexplained this time; and he had the advantage of Ali Baba's familiarity with the lay of things. Our seventeen rascals with Ayisha in their midst came on at top speed, straight for the tent, where it might be expected that Narayan Singh and I would be, since we were nowhere else in evidence.

Midway, Ayisha whirled aside to confront and harangue the lined-up camel-men; and she showed the same sort of form that she did at El-Maan railway station* when we first saw her in action. Under the very eyes of Ali Higg himself they could hardly do other than hear her respectfully; but you don't have to be a savage to get all worked up when a pretty young woman with a rifle in her hand screams warlike exhortations at you from a blooded camel. She thrilled me; and I had something else to think about.

It didn't look good to me to leave old Ibrahim ben Ah to stew in his resentment, and perhaps to spoil Ayisha's game at a critical moment. Having no notion what the game might be, still it was hardly a stroke of genius to suppose that she would play it more easily without that handicap.

On the other hand, it looked no better to submit him to indignity before his men. If they once got the notion in their heads that Ibrahim ben Ah was in disgrace, they would be all the more likely to try to take advantage of Ayisha, because, as the Turks are so fond of saying, "a fish begins stinking from the head." The suggestion that a commander can be deposed in the field spreads insubordination in the rank and file.

I had made up my mind what to do, whether Grim should approve or not, before Ali Baba and his sixteen reached the tent and halted in a cloud of dust. Our two camels were kneeling twenty feet away; and Ibrahim ben Ah's magnificent beast, all hung with worsted ornaments and blue beads, was standing at a picket close by.

"It is time for you two to come!" called

*See "The Lion of Petra" in the March 20th issue.

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Ali Baba with a note of almost desperate excitement in his raven voice.

"Nay, three of us!" I shouted back. "Send two men in here swiftly. Let a third bring the commander's camel."

There was one thing about those thieves of ours; they were used to teamwork, and in any kind of crisis they were as swift as lightning. Nobody stopped to argue. I tapped the muzzle of my pistol on Ibrahim's shoulder.

"Now," said I, "alive or dead, you're coming with us to Ali Higg yonder. If you want to save your face before your men, act dignified. We're either a guard of honor or a prisoner's escort, whichever you prefer. You may keep your weapons for the present, but I'll take them all away from you in front of your men and make you walk to Ali Higg if you try to start any kind of trouble. Get up!"

He didn't try anything. The old man liked his dignity too well. He rose to his feet without a word. Mujrim and Mahommed closed in on either side of him, and led him to his camel.

The gang reformed platoon. Our old fox Ali Baba brought his camel alongside Ibrahim's, and led off, followed by Narayan Singh and me with our pistols ready but not too openly displayed. Behind us rode the sixteen, eight abreast. Not even Xerxes, King of Persia, ever rode from his tent with greater apparent honor, and I gravely doubt whether even Ayisha, all eyes though she was for everything and all alert for information, suspected until we were gone that Ibrahim ben Ah had been made prisoner.

We rode out of the bivouac at a walk, as any general with his staff might go to attend a conference. And when we came within a hundred yards of Grim he wheeled and rode away ahead of us, answering the roars of the Bedouins with a curt wave of the hand. A minute later he swung at a gallop around the corner of the hill, and we were hard put to it to overtake him.

But he wouldn't let me draw abreast to compare notes yet. Grim is one of those fellows who, if he had the part of *Othello* to act, would blacken his skin all over. We were still visible to the lookout on the spur, and perhaps to others on the hill-top. He signed to me to keep my distance, for it seemed that Ali Higg had a reputation for preferring to ride all by himself in advance of his men.

So I had to bide my time until we reached that same deep *wady* in which Narayan Singh and I had talked with Ali Baba, and I didn't spend it envying Ayisha, with the job on her hands of maneuvering a hundred and forty cutthroats in accordance with some secret plan; though I daresay she asked nothing better, if only because she was usurping Jael's prerogative.

Our baggage beasts were kneeling in a fine hiding-place between boulders, not far from where we had come on Ali Baba, and there Grim halted at last for a talk, and we all gathered around him in the shadow of an overhanging rock.

IBRAHIM BEN AH opened on him without preliminary, and with no more courtesy than the Prophet Elijah, for instance, used to show toward sinful Israelitish kings.

"Who are you, who pose as the Lion of Petra?" he demanded angrily of Jimgrim.

"Does it matter?" Grim answered smiling.

"*Malaish!*" he retorted. "No, no matter. A dog comes to a dog's end! Death and a dung-hill—*khallas!*"*

"Isn't it a little soon to talk of dogs and dunghills?" Grim answered pleasantly. "One friend is better than a hundred enemies."

At that there came into Ibrahim ben Ah's eyes a look of calculating, cold cupidity. When men of the desert kidnap important people, they kill them or hold them to ransom; that is the accepted procedure. They certainly don't offer to make friends with them unless their own position is too desperate for ordinary measures. And desperate folk must accept exacting terms. The very bristles of the old man's beard seemed to move as his temper changed, and he eyed Grim with a rising insolence.

"What does such a man as you imagine he can offer me?" he demanded.

Grim laughed good-temperedly.

"Perhaps only a choice of evils. But a choice is something. I might send you back to Petra for Jael to laugh at."

The savage old commander's mood changed rapidly once more.

"By Allah," he snarled, "I will make no bargains with a tent sneak-thief! Do thy worst, son of a dog!"

*Finish!

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"You're going to have no chance to make a bargain," Grim answered. "There's an offer going to be made to you. You may accept it and smile, or reject it and take the consequences. None of us is going to be inconvenienced in either case."

Ibrahim ben Ah became bewildered. He sat down cross-legged on the sand, with a gesture implying that the future lay in Allah's lap. If he had been deprived of his weapons and jewels, perhaps he might have thought he understood; but there gleamed the diamonds on his fingers; there were his rifle—pistols—knives; and instead of scowling, talking about ransom or threatening torture his captor smiled at him good-humoredly and talked conundrums.

"*Inshallah*, we shall see," he said simply.

So Grim sat down too and folded his arms, with his back to the sunlight, in position to read the old man's face. You can glean more information from a man's passing expressions than from anything he says, in most instances, provided you own the proper eyes for the business.

"Have you heard of Jimgrim?" Grim asked him; and Ibrahim's eyes opened wider by a fraction of an inch.

"I have ears. Surely I have heard of him. An infidel, who went to Mecca in defiance of the Moslem law. An unbelieving dog, who should be shown no quarter."

"I am Jimgrim," Grim assured him pleasantly.

"I knew it!" answered our venerable captive; and his eyes closed again ever so slightly, so that I don't think he had even guessed the fact until that minute.

"I dare say you know all about me?"

Ibrahim screwed up his face, something after the fashion of a Christian missionary who is asked to give his opinion of the active agent of a rival denomination.

"Most men in this land have heard of you. You have a name for being clever."

"And a liar?"

"No, I have not heard that said of you."

"Do you remember what I was doing in the great war?"

"Surely. I heard of you. You worked for Feisul."

"Didn't you work for him too?" demanded Grim.

"By Allah, that I did! So did we all. Feisul is the rightful king of all this land. A true descendant of the Prophet. A son of the king of Mecca. A God-fearing man, on whom be peace! Would I might lead a squadron behind Feisul again!"

"Then in that we are agreed," said Grim. "Feisul is the rightful king of all this land."

"Yes—if it is my last word on earth!"

"I worked for Feisul in the war. I'm working for him now," said Grim.

"Then why do you make a prisoner of me, a friend of his?"

"My old friend Ali Baba told me that you contemplated going over to Saoud the Avenger with most of Ali Higg's men," Grim replied evasively.

"I never told him that!"

"Possibly. But a fox can guess which way a rooster means to run."

"Well, he guessed shrewdly," Ibrahim answered after a moment's pause.

He seemed to be making up his mind that nothing could be gained by not humoring his interrogator. "I am sick of Ali Higg, the Lion of Petra. The Avenger has eight hundred men already; a hundred and forty more would make him a power in the land."

"And a general of you, eh? But Saoud the Avenger is out for himself, not for Feisul."

"So is Ali Higg out for himself and not for Feisul. And Feisul is a puppet ruler in Damascus, waiting to be turned out by the French and sent begging."

"But you are for Feisul," said Grim.

"Surely. But what can I do?"

"You could have done a lot of harm to Feisul's cause by strengthening Saoud the Avenger," Grim answered.

"It is true that the French will turn Feisul out of Damascus; they are determined, he already suspects it, and I know it."

"*Mashallah!* What a wise one! How do you know it?"

"It is my business to know things," Grim answered. "Some men know about religion, others about the sea and tides; some study machinery; others know when camels will have young, and whether the price of wheat will rise or fall.

"I know about the intrigues of certain Governments. And as a trader looks for safety in a falling market, anticipating the day when it will rise again, so I foresee the outcome of intrigue and look beyond it and make ready. It is true that Feisul will be turned out of Damascus."

"Then why work any more for him? The hide of a dying camel isn't worth much.

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why not look elsewhere—for instance, toward Saoud the Avenger?"

"Because Feisul has a host of friends, of whom I am one, and a loyal one," Grim answered. "Feisul will return, and the wise ones will make ready for him. There is all Mesopotamia and most of Arabia waiting to be welded into one. Who can do that except Feisul?"

"But the Avenger——"

"If he were strong enough, would set himself up against Feisul when the time comes. And of the two, which is the better man?"

"*Wallahi*, Feisul!"

"Then, why strengthen the Avenger? If, when Feisul comes, there should be two chiefs in these parts, neither of them strong enough to defeat the other, Feisul may make peace between them and secure the loyalty of both."

Ibrahim ben Ah's glittering, calculating eyes opened wider again, and his lips showed traces of a smile.

"And those," Grim went on slowly, "who have worked for Feisul will be reckoned Feisul's friends when his star rises. Which would you rather be reckoned—a friend of the Avenger, or of Feisul?"

"*Wallahi*, of Feisul!"

"I also. So we are agreed again. Now which is a man's friend—he who forgets and deserts him for the stronger side when foreign Governments break promises and betray him; or he who remembers, and watches, biding the time when the star that set in the West shall rise in the East again?"

"But you have separated me from my men. *Mashallah!* What use am I now to Feisul or any one?"

"Well," Grim answered, "I'll be frank with you. I didn't separate you from your men. My intention was to let Ayisha make good her boast that she can lead you by the nose."

Ibrahim ben Ah laughed scornfully at that.

"The woman Ayisha lied!" he retorted. "Now and then she has brought me messages from Ali Higg, and I have obeyed the messages, but not the woman. If she were Jael, that might be different. But Jael sent me word saying that the Lion has divorced Ayisha. If she had tried to lead me by the nose, I would have made a present of her to the first man who cared to feed the *bint!*"*

*Bint—girl—a rather disrespectful term.

"Yet, you see," said Grim, smiling pleasantly, "how Allah makes all things easy! I had in mind, as well, to rescue my two friends from your possibly dangerous society. They had no instructions from me to bring you away with them; yet Allah is all-knowing, and it seems it was not written that you should tell your men about the woman Ayisha's divorce.

"But it was written that my friends should so admire you as to crave your further company and cause you to be my guest for a while. I didn't expect it; but who am I that I should refuse hospitality to a friend of Feisul's?"

"*Shu hashsharaf!*"* Ibrahim ben Ah exclaimed sarcastically. "You are possibly a worthy host, but I have called you hard names. Do you mean to swallow them?"

"I shall give you a chance to withdraw them before I speak of swallowing. What a man says in anger, being ignorant of all the facts, should form no part of the reckoning between host and guest, or between two friends of Feisul."

"And if I will not withdraw them?"

"We shall see."

Ibrahim ben Ah looked slowly around at the faces of our Arabs, who were listening as breathlessly as children at a play. Unseen by Grim, old Ali Baba tapped the bolt of his rifle with a threatening forefinger. Ibrahim ben Ah decided to consider matters further before definitely turning down Grim's offer of friendship; he judged the alternative might be swift, and far from sweet.

"But if you are Jimgrim," he said, "where is Ali Higg? And who can the Jimgrim be who sent me a warning at dawn? There must be two of you, for you came from the north, whereas the other disappeared toward the south."

"That other," Grim answered, "is Ali Higg himself pretending to be me."

"*Mashallah!* Why?"

"Presumably to draw off some of the Avenger's men."

Ibrahim ben Ah nodded. The virtue of that piece of intrigue appealed to him at once.

"A shrewd plan!" he commented. "I see how that could be done. There was a day when Jimgrim, having Government remounts in charge, disobeyed an order and sent five hundred camels to Saoud the

*What an honor!

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Avenger. So if Jimgrim, pretending to be in distress, sends to the Avenger now for a loan of five hundred men for a few days—yes—I see the merit of that plan. With only three or four hundred left to him the Avenger might be taken unaware and defeated easily. I see."

Grim smiled broadly.

"Let us hope he does succeed in decoying five hundred men," he answered. "I hardly think the Avenger will prove quite so generous as that. But even so, do you think one hundred and forty or so could defeat the number the Avenger would still have?"

"*Inshallah*, if Jimgrim had a hand in it."

"I'm afraid you're a flatterer," said Grim, "or else you think better of Ali Higg's ruffians than I do. No, there's going to be no battle with the Avenger."

"You will be a clever one if you can prevent it," Ibrahim ben Ah retorted. "The Avenger is already on the move."

"So is Ayisha," answered Grim. "And so shall we be in twenty minutes."

Once more Ibrahim ben Ah's gesture and attitude betokened resignation to inevitable fate.

"Who am I that I should understand such craziness!" he exclaimed. "Let the Avenger come then, and eat up the land like the locust. It is Allah's will."

"I know the heart of Feisul, and I understand a little of the heart of Ali Higg," Grim answered. "I can guess the course of Saoud the Avenger. But the will of Allah is something I can not divine. I am no prophet. Perhaps you are?"

"Nay, nay! I never said it."

"Then we neither of us know the will of Allah, and we are agreed again. That makes three points of agreement. Let us see if we can find a fourth."

"*Taib*. Let us see."

"Feisul will be turned out of Damascus by the French, and will go to Europe. Later he will return and be made ruler of all this country, or at least of the greater part of it. When that day comes, would you like to be on the side of the Avenger, and so obliged to oppose Feisul?"

"No."

"Would you eat the Avenger's salt now, and betray him afterward when Feisul comes?"

"Nay; why should I? But will Feisul come? I hear you say he will, but is that proof of it? *Wallahi!* A man might say with equal ease that the sky will fall on us."

"Nevertheless, you are a man of judgment, used to weighing words. Wild sayings in the mouth of one man are stark truth on the lips of another. Do I look like a fool to you? Look at these friends of mine. Do they look like fools? Would such men follow a mere babbler of vanities? And would I, think you, risk my life and the lives of my friends in this desert, paving the way for a man who is not positively sure to come?"

"Well, what is your bargain?" Ibrahim ben Ah asked dryly after a moment's pause, during which he examined Grim's face like a jeweler studying the works of a watch.

"I make no bargain," Grim answered. "I told you that. If you are a knave and a liar—a man untrue to his salt—forgetful of his friends—a mere desert jackal, changing sides at every opportunity, I will have nothing to do with you. If that is what you are, I will give you your camel and turn you loose, to die with the other jackals when your time comes."

"That is a hard saying," said Ibrahim ben Ah.

"Nevertheless, a true one," answered Grim. "But if you are a man true to his salt—a friend of Feisul—unwilling to betray the Lion of Petra without first giving him fair warning face to face, then I will make you an offer."

"*Wallahi!* You look like the Lion in countenance, but you talk like an honest fellow, Jimgrim! If the Lion had thy spirit, as he has thy face, I would never have considered leaving him."

"You can leave him now, if you wish," Grim answered. "None will prevent you. There kneels your camel. Take it, if you will."

"But Ali Higg is not for Feisul," Ibrahim ben Ah objected.

"Any man is for Feisul, who prevents the Avenger from growing too great and fouling Feisul's rightful nest," Grim answered. "So if you continue to serve Ali Higg, you will be working in behalf of Feisul until Feisul comes."

"But how can I serve Ali Higg without the army you have taken from me by a trick?"

"Just at present much better than with it."

"How?"

Grim turned toward Ali Baba with one

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of those business smiles of his that make you wonder why he isn't a millionaire, or at least the representative of one.

"Bring bread and salt," he ordered.

That took a minute or two, for one of Ali Baba's sons had to go and unfasten a camel-load and take the remains of breakfast from the top. Ibrahim ben Ah had plenty of time to weigh in his mind what was going to happen next.

"Your camel waits," said Grim. "You may go free. None will fire at you. There is no dishonor in refusing to eat salt."

But Ibrahim ben Ah made no move until Mohammed gave bread and salt to Ali Baba, who handed it in turn to Grim. Thus it had full significance—son's hand into father's; captain of the gang's hand into Grim's. It was official salt, produced under the eyes of witnesses.

Grim broke a piece of bread and dipped it in the salt in front of Ibrahim ben Ah, who followed suit. Each man ate his morsel in silence. Then—

"I have eaten thy salt, O Jimgrim," said Ibrahim ben Ah.

"I bear witness!" announced Ali Baba. "I, with sixteen sons and grandsons, bear witness that Ibrahim ben Ah, commander of the host of Ali Higg, the Lion of Petra, has eaten the salt of Jimgrim."

"We bear witness!" they chorused after him.

"And now?" asked Ibrahim ben Ah, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

"I will show you how to turn a trick for Feisul," answered Grim. "You are a man, I take it, who loves truth?"

"None better. But the stuff is rare!"

"And I daresay it amuses you to tell the truth and see the fool who listens twist it to his own undoing?"

"That is the essence of all humor, Jimgrim. Aye, *wallahi!* I am good at that."

"And are you afraid to go to the Avenger?"

"*Tfui!* Why should I be? Has not the Avenger sent me messages to win me over to his side?"

"Then if it can be shown afterward that you served Ali Higg's cause well by doing so, so that after the event Ali Higg must needs trust you more than ever as a man of exceeding courage and wisdom in extremity, will you go to the Avenger and tell him truth with which he may confound himself?"

"By ——, Jimgrim, you ask a lot, don't you?"

"Not a bit of it! I ask nothing. I offer you an opportunity. But if you are afraid——"

"In the name of the Prophet, on whom be peace, don't talk to me of fear, thou foreigner! If you, who are a stranger from a land of cursed infidels, can risk your bold neck for Feisul, am I less than you?"

"Let us admit you are the greater," answered Grim.

"*Taib.* It is nothing but the truth; for my men are a hundred and forty—yours but a score."

That was too much for Narayan Singh's self-control; he broke out into a smile such as you can see on the faces of the gargoyles of Notre Dame, or some of the temple images of India. And as for Ali Baba, there was no containing his disgust.

"Jimgrim may admit what he pleases," he declared scornfully. "As for me, I am an insect under Allah's heel. But behold my sons and grandsons! There are not their like in all the continents! Are we only a score all told? Then we are better than a hundred score of dogs like thine!"

"Prodigies, no doubt!" said Ibrahim ben Ah.

"Aye, by Allah's favor, prodigies! Look at this one—my eldest-born."

He took Mujrim by the arm and pulled him forward.

"Have you such a giant in all your army of cattle-lifters? Look at him! Judge of his strength!

"And here," he said, grabbing hold of me, "is one who had the better of him in a bout! These two alone could beat thy army of camp-scavengers!"

It was a relief to me to know that the old man had taken the defeat of Mujrim in that spirit; I had rather dreaded the outcome. But it isn't exactly comfortable to be led forth by the arm like a professional pugilist and have your horn blown by some one who can boast as he pleases and then leave you to make good the vaunts. As I've said, I enjoy a stand-up fight on equal terms, but there are limits.

However, Grim was fortunately in no mood for side issues of that sort.

"We must get the better of a bigger force than Ali Higg's, and boasting beforehand isn't going to help much. Let us start now, and sing songs about it afterward."

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HE SUITED action to the word by walking to his camel; but he did not mount until Ibrahim ben Ah had mounted—an act of courtesy that, I think, went a long way to confirm the old pirate's newly pledged friendship. What was more, he gave Ibrahim the place of honor by his side, and we had ridden up out of the ravine and traveled several miles in a more or less southerly direction before I had any chance to talk with him privately.

At last, though, Ibrahim ben Ah fell back with the perfectly obvious intent of satisfying curiosity by drawing into conversation whoever might feel disposed that way; and I seized the opportunity to range alongside Grim.

"You're the ——," said I, and he laughed.

"How so?"

"I've had how many adventures with you? Quite a number. All the while I've supposed you were a sort of volunteer policeman, satisfied to keep the peace and let history shape itself."

"So I am."

"Not you! I've found you out. What beats me is why you never told me you're gunning for Feisul all this time. I know Feisul," I said, "and I like him. He assays pounds to the ton of pure gold. Why in thunder couldn't you tell me that all this lonely, dangerous business is in Feisul's behalf? I'd have been twice as keen."

The hot wind was excuse enough for not answering at once. There came a sudden blast of it that whirled the dust into our faces, obliging a man to tuck his chin down into the face-cloth and lean forward.

But he was silent for several minutes after the squall had passed. For he is a strange fellow; I think it strains him somewhere inside to be obliged to make confession of his deepest thoughts.

He is the exact opposite, in fact, of a propagandist. I think he feels that the airing of desire and parading of convictions are indecent. He smiles at other men's and makes a secret of his own. To some extent, too, he treasures ultimate purpose as if its very secrecy were half its strength, permitting only momentary glimpses of it under the stress of circumstance.

"You wouldn't have been half as keen," he said at last. "Tell me why you have come as far as this with me."

I chewed the cud on that before I answered. Few men can explain their real motives at a moment's notice.

"Because I consider you a white man who can show me sport," I answered after a minute.

"Have you changed your mind?" he answered.

"No."

"But if I had told you in the first place that I'm bent on putting Humpty-dumpty back on a wall that he hasn't been knocked from yet, you'd have put me down as a visionary; and, even supposing you'd still come for the sport of the thing, you'd have hung back all the time, and argued; and sooner or later you'd have discovered that your own affairs are more important to you than my dreams."

"But I've told you I like Feisul," I said.

"All right. Has your discovery that I'm working for him changed your judgment in any way?"

"Of course not. I'm glad to know that you think as highly of him as I do."

"Well, then, what's the trouble?"

"I'm not troubled. I'm interested. You're the first man I ever met who had a cause and wouldn't talk about it. Most men get on soap-boxes, or into pulpits, or sit at a desk, and yell."

"Let 'em!" he answered. "Any man may waste his time who feels like it. I don't like noise, and don't believe it gets you anywhere.

"Each man's opinions are his own affair; goats, sheep, rats, camels, fish have opinions, too, I daresay. I have mine, but I don't inflict 'em on other folk. Who was it said we're faced by circumstances, not by theories?"

"Very well," I answered, "here's a circumstance. If you had told me to begin with that you are out for Feisul, I would have jumped at the opportunity to help."

"Seems to me you've helped quite a bit as things are," he answered smiling. "But anyhow I hate that kind of thing—despise it! No man has any right to cajole me into risking my life, or risking anything else for that matter, in his cause. I've no right to play such a dirty trick on you, or any one. You wanted adventure. You asked for it. Have I proved a niggard host?"

"Ha-ha!"

"Besides, I'm out for Feisul with reservations. It's not my job to foist him on to the Arabs. That's up to them. I saw them root

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for him during the war, and after the armistice. I've watched every underhanded, dirty, low-down trick in the process of getting rid of Feisul from outside; and if I loathe anything on God's green earth it's control of other people by so-called interests. I'm more against the foreign politicians than for Feisul.

"If Feisul can come back, and the Arabs still want him, I'll do my bit to make things easy for him and them, that's all. I won't preach for him. I won't argue. I won't betray the uniform I sometimes wear, or the Administration that pays my salary. But when I come across people here and there, who happen to think the same way I do, and want to see Feisul back, I'll work with them like a beaver, and that's all."

It seemed about enough to me. I made up my mind there and then to let private affairs in America go hang, and to see Grim through on his rather original, perhaps Quixotic, quite unselfish, and possibly unprofitable quest.

CHAPTER IX

"Should I stoop to a pig-Pathan, with a prince waiting for me?"

THERE are two outstanding peculiarities of that ancient land of Edom, wherein we were adventuring; for that matter, they apply to all Arabia, most of Palestine and Syria, and to the desert places in between that are any man's land or nobody's according to the seasons, and disease, and the ebb or flow of politics.

One is that warfare is governed and restricted absolutely by the water-holes. An army can move only from one hole to another, as in a game of checkers.

Consequently a man like Allenby, who was daring enough to import American iron pipe and pump his water-supply along behind the army, was able to upset all calculations. The Turks swore first and last that it wasn't fair, and the German General Staff agreed with them. Failing an efficient force of modern engineers, whoever makes war in the desert moves by water-holes.

The other outstanding feature is a mental peculiarity of the inhabitants. They are first-class fighting men in most ways, but utterly unreliable when reporting numbers. Not even the Bulgarian general staff, when counting prisoners of war, was half as wild in its estimate as any Bedouin invariably is when speaking of his own force or the enemy's.

Tribes that can put seventy rifles in the field boast glibly of seven hundred. Opposed to a hundred men, they will describe them as a thousand; and after a victory will sing about ten thousand—which perhaps accounts for some of the swollen returns in Old Testament history.

We knew the strength of Ali Higg's force, now led by Ayisha, pretty accurately. A hundred and forty was about the right figure. But Saoud the Avenger probably believed them to be seven or eight hundred at least; and he may have supposed them more numerous than that.

It followed that, although the Avenger's force was reported to number eight hundred rifles and a thousand camels, that estimate might safely be cut in half by any conservative strategist. Probabilities are dangerous things to play with, but it was no worse than a fair guess that the Avenger had with him in the field twice or three times the number of men that we could dispose of, but no more.

A little army like that, however, can swell in numbers after a victory in much the same way that a mountain torrent overflows its banks. So if the Avenger should by any stroke of fortune or flash of generalship outmaneuver Grim, hundreds more from scattered settlements were likely to flock to his standard within a day or two; and to feed them he would have to carry on, seeing there is no such food-consuming, unproductive Frankenstein monster as a victorious army that sits still.

We soon were to have a chance to form our own estimate of the real strength of the rival forces. In front of us was a sugar-loaf hill, cut sheer on the northern side. Grim led straight toward it.

In the distance on our right, cut off from us by two or three deep *wadys* and a waste of rock-strewn sand, was Ayisha's column kicking up a cloud of dust like the smoke-trail of an ocean liner.

We left our camels at the foot of the sugar-loaf hill—where there wasn't a vestige of water, by the way—and Ibrahim ben Ah, Mujrim, Ali Baba, Narayan Singh, Grim and I struggled painfully to the top on foot. The rocks, and even the sand in places, were hot enough to burn you through the soles of thick shoes.

From the top we had a good view of Abu

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Lissan in the distance—apparently a cluster of mud and stone roofs, with a minaret or two and a good-sized patch of green that betokened date-trees.

"Good plundering yonder!" was Ibrahim ben Ah's sole comment as soon as he had recovered breath.

Ali Baba and Mujrim echoed him. It didn't look like good anything to me from that distance; a more discouraging landscape, or a meaner lot of squalid buildings, wouldn't be very easy to imagine. But I suppose such experts in the art of acquiring other men's belongings would know where to dig for treasure that the mean surroundings were deliberately planned to mask.

We could see for many miles in every direction—even as far as the *fiumara* behind us, in which we had camped the previous night. The hill, with three wells in the crook of its elbow, where Ayisha had taken charge and we had made a "guest" of Ibrahim ben Ah, cast a long blue shadow to our right rear.

Over on our left, extending in a ridge like a monster's backbone for endless miles until it ran into the sky at the horizon, lay one of the mountain chains of Edom, with a much lower, broken range at its feet, running very nearly parallel, so that the two were like a double earthwork on a titanic scale. In two or three places many miles apart between breaks in the lower range were patches of bright green, indicating water.

From that mountain range, all the way across our front as far as Abu Lissan, was dry desert, blown here and there into humps like a camel's. At a guess, that part of the plain was fifteen miles across, measured in a straight line from Abu Lissan in any direction, so that the town, which itself was a smirch on the face of a hillside, stood as it were a hub in the center of a half-wheel, because the chain of hills on our left had a pronounced curve.

The nearest water-hole to Abu Lissan that we could see from where we stood lay about five miles away from us on our left hand. No buildings were visible, but there were enough trees to suggest ample supplies of water; and it was obvious at a glance that an army advancing on Petra would have its choice of two routes.

The longer, northwesterly way on our right hand, as we stood facing Abu Lissan, would lead by the wells where Ibrahim ben Ah had bivouacked. That to the northeast, on our left hand, would follow the foot-hills, providing water at the end of fifteen miles, and a further scant supply in the bed of the *fiumara* in which we spent the night.

A commander might divide his force for sake of the time that he would save at the water-holes, sending half his men by either route, rendezvousing in the *fiumara* for a march on Petra. Alternatively, any one attacking Abu Lissan might converge simultaneously from two water-holes, and be secured against that bugbear of an army, a congested, dry line of retreat.

THE Avenger had seized the water-hole to our left, for we could see an advance-guard of his camel-men taking it easy there. Grim swore he could make out a machine-gun through the glasses, and Ibrahim ben Ah confirmed that with a discouraged nod. But as Narayan Singh said promptly:

"A machine-gun in the hands of such folk works while it is new. Thereafter it impedes them, for they wait on it, and dance about it, and swear, and pray; and then, because it continues jammed, they waste time trying to hide it from the enemy, who naturally make it as hot for them as possible. And presently, because their faith was in the machine-gun, they lose courage and run. I know; for I have seen."

Another force of the Avengers, of, I should say, two hundred men, was advancing leisurely behind a sand ridge two by two, to join the advance-guard at the water-hole. We could see their heads and their spears and rifles over the top of the ridge. They might be going to spend the night at the water-hole—for they don't as a rule make a long march on the first day out—or possibly they intended to rest there, and make a forced march by night on Petra, which in that case would bring them into the entrance gorge somewhere about dawn.

We looked for a long time before we detected signs of the Avenger's other wing, which as a matter of fact had started on its way toward the three wells by which Ibrahim ben Ah had bivouacked. For several minutes we could not even make out Ayisha's column, which had taken cover far to our right in a *wady*. She had placed nine or ten men on a high mound near its rim to keep watch, and they lay low; but the sun gleaming on their rifle-barrels gave the clue to the column's whereabouts.

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The men of the Avenger's left wing had caught sight of Ayisha's column before it entered the *wady*, and themselves had taken cover amid a cluster of rocks and sand-hills near the middle of the plain below us to our right front. They were extremely well hidden, being difficult to make out even from our height looking downward.

They were evidently waiting for instructions. A thing that looked like a bedbug moving at amazing speed resolved itself with the aid of Grim's glasses into a camel-man riding ——bent-for-leather toward Abu Lissan. So it was a fair presumption that the Avenger hadn't left headquarters yet—a presumption that strengthened the other, that the whole force had intended to bivouac for the night at the two water-holes.

And now another hypothesis devleoped into something like a fact. Unless the Avenger had several hundred men remaining with him in Abu Lissan, of which there was no sign, or unless he had sent a raiding-force away in another direction, which was unlikely, considering the task in front of him of tackling the hitherto invariably successful Ali Higg, then the total number of men he could dispose of dwindled already to five hundred at the outside estimate.

The two bodies of camel-men were close enough to be considered one force, since either of them could race to the assistance of the other in the event of a surprize attack. But it was pretty clear, nevertheless, that Ayisha's appearance on the scene with a compact force of a hundred and forty, which probably looked twice as big to their nervous imagination, had considerably upset calculations.

You see, the Avenger had done all the boasting. It was he who had pronounced damnation on Ali Higg, declaring him a heretic, which is the perfect form of propaganda in all Moslem lands. It was the Avenger, not Ali Higg, who had promised conquest and loot—women and gold and camels—the swift, tumultuous triumph for which the Bedouin's heart burns. So it was naturally disconcerting to find Ali Higg's men first in the field—and on their flank at that, instead of in a trap between the two wings of the Avenger, where a reasonable enemy ought to be.

Ibrahim ben Ah began to grow excited, and old Ali Baba seconded him.

"Now, Jimgrim! Send a message to Ayisha quickly. Bid her attack at once. Those cowards of the Avenger's don't know what to do. They'll run, and be slaughtered.

"Then, having dealt with them as they deserve, we can cross the plain and show those others how brave men tackle a machine-gun. Quick now! Let me go!"

"Aye, let him go!" agreed Ali Baba.

If I had stood in Grim's shoes I would have done just that. But Narayan Singh sat still on a rock and watched Grim's face; and Grim said nothing for a while—only kept on smiling. The more those two old firebrands clamored, the more set he seemed to be doing nothing, and on saying less. Ibrahim ben Ah actually clutched his arm at last, and shouted in his ear:

"Allah sends such opportunity but once in a man's life! *Allaho akbar!* Say the word, Jimgrim, and a hundred men shall overwhelm a thousand!"

"There's not going to be any fight," Grim answered at last.

"But we could win easily!"

"Maybe. Perhaps. But one fight breeds another. There's a better way of settling this."

He turned to Ali Baba.

"Call up those sons of yours from down below, old fox."

That suited the old man perfectly. He was a fanatic about those sons and grandsons. No plan could fail, in his opinion, if they were linked up with it; and he retained the courage of conviction in spite of the fact that if you added up their jail sentences it would need a Methuselah to contemplate the lot with equanimity. He went to bellow to them, making a trumpet of his hands, and in a minute they were swarming up-hill.

"Let's hope the Avenger has a field-glass," said Grim.

And that was no wild-cat suggestion, because during the great war nearly all the Arab commanders in the field became possessed of things of that kind, either in the form of loot from Turkish and German officers, or as presents from the Allies.

Twenty-one men, all armed with rifles, can make a fairly good showing over half a mile of hill-top, if they move about enough. We spread out in both directions, dodging behind boulders, sometimes running, sometimes walking across the open; and then, as if Grim were directing the making of a motion picture, retiring out of

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sight to form platoon, march in and out of view, reform into single line to look like a different body of men, and finally disappear.

AT THE end of half an hour we had accomplished one thing anyhow. Both wings of the Avenger's men had seen us. Evidently they did not have field-glasses, or the shorter range would have betrayed the trick. The men advancing toward the water-hole began to hurry forward, and those already waiting there collected their camels and took close formation.

"Now for the awkward half an hour!" said Grim. "We win or lose now on the strength of what the Avenger ate for breakfast. If he felt good, and sent his brightest man away with the right wing, we're done for. We'll have to call Ayisha off, and scoot for the tall timber. Any wing commander worthy of his salt would send scouts now to look behind this hill. But if the Avenger didn't feel good, and kept his brightest man by, handy to advise with; and if, on top of that, he's got news of a certain Jimgrim snooping somewhere to the southward—Lord knows what the Lion's doing, but it's certain he's pretending to be me—then that left wing may rest satisfied that we're a strong force, and wait for orders. The Avenger may decide to recall 'em all, and watch points."

It was then that Narayan Singh gave proof of his military judgment. As I have said, he is fit to command a brigade, if only a brigadier in these exacting days didn't have to stay sober all the time.

"Why leave it to their judgment, *sahib?*" he growled out.

He can't speak gently about military matters, but thrusts out his jaw and looks savage.

"We are one-and-twenty men. That is a scouting force big enough to represent two hundred men at least. If we go scouting they will draw their horns in, thinking we are likely an advance-guard sent to force a fight."

"Right you are!" Grim answered. "You usually are right. If they should call the bluff we'd be no worse off than if they'd sent their own scouts out to investigate us."

But even so it was a risky business. Too much depended on the temper of the Avenger's men, and on what instructions he had given them. All we had to count on was the psychological effect made on them by surprize at finding what they supposed was a strong force.

But there never was a plan of any sort, since Adam was booted neck and crop from Eden, that hadn't its Achilles' heel, and its moment when success depended on the other fellow's doing the wrong thing. Otherwise we'd all have been back in Eden long ago.

We clambered down the hill, mounted our camels, and swooped out suddenly on the plain, going at a fast clip in close formation for the first mile. Then we opened out to fifty yards or so apart, just as a precaution in case that machine-gun should be really in working order.

We had one indisputable advantage. The splendor of old Ibrahîm ben Ah's raiment, and the red-and-blue trappings of his camel, proclaimed him from a long way off as a person of distinction; such individuals don't lead scouting or skirmishing parties as a rule unless there is a strong supporting force within hail.

Moreover, we were all magnificently mounted; the points of a camel are the first things that appeal to a Bedouin's eye; and, just as a good store-window suggests opulence within—without necessarily insuring it, so the perfect turn-out of a force of scouts implies a well-found, numerous army in its rear, notwithstanding the uncensored, open pages of the Chronicle of Bluff.

But, as I said, it was a risky business. They actually started on its way a force of twice our number to ascertain our intention; and Ibrahim ben Ah, lifelong follower of desert tactics, shouted to us to scatter and run.

But Grim is a first-class poker-player, and not addicted to throwing down his cards just because some one across the table has raised him a hundred per cent. He sent Ali Baba's youngest grandson scurrying back alone toward our sugar-loaf hill, as if to bring out reenforcements, and led straight on.

You remember how the stars in their courses fought against Sisera? Well, the sun was out, so I can't vouch for the stars; but the kites and eagles came to our assistance.

We had left our baggage-camels hobbled among boulders at the rear of the hill; and

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I suppose, not liking to be left behind, they had called attention to themselves by struggling to get up. They may have looked from the upper realms of air like dying animals. I can't vouch for that either.

But I do know that three or four eagles, at least a dozen vultures, and kites by the score began circling above them with a meal in view. What more could you ask for to establish the presence of a considerable force of men?

So the oncoming skirmishers retired before us without coming close enough to make an exchange of shots worth anybody's while. And at about that moment the galloper came hurrying back from Abu Lissan with orders for the other wing. They sent men to meet him, to save time.

There was an exchange of signals, and the Avenger's left wing left cover in a hurry, smoking back for the town with a devil-take-the-hindermost appearance, which may or may not have been deceptive. And as the hindermost were mostly baggage-camels laden to capacity, it was all Grim could do to restrain Ali Baba from leading his gang of thieves in hot pursuit.

"Why should Allah make things easy, if we refuse to help ourselves?" he demanded with pious wrath.

But he is a loyal old fox, and gave in, fuming, when Grim made his veto sufficiently emphatic.

The sudden retreat of the left wing was the last straw that convinced the Avenger's right. They packed up their precious machine-gun and departed from that waterhole of one accord and with one mind; and the dust of their going, caught up in a blast of the simoom, was like the smoke-screen of a fleet in action.

One thing that was no news in the dawn of history, but that the Allies had to learn all over in the great war, is that, though Arabs are like a steel-shod tempest in attack, coming on as if welcoming death to the roar of their "*Allaho akbar*," you can't stop them when they once start running.

Then they're like steers in a stampede; the camels seem to catch the frenzy of their riders, and the whole lot go scurrying helter-skelter for the hiding-place nearest to home. Some even actually do go home, disregarding the runaway's prerogative of coming back to fight another day.

So we found ourselves possessed of that oasis in the gap in the lower range of hills; and since the dust kicked up by their retreat rendered us perfectly invisible to the Avenger's men we made our way to it leisurely, most of us roaring with laughter and exchanging jokes.

Only one thing seemed to worry Grim now. There was a serious danger that Ayisha might not be able to restrain her men from following the general retreat with a view to plunder.

Although that would certainly have turned disorder into utter rout, it would have just as certainly brought on reprisals as soon as the Avenger should have rallied his runaways in Abu Lissan. Reprisals were the last thing Grim was looking for.

He sent Mujrim at top speed to find Ayisha, with orders for her to leave twenty men under a picked captain, who could create an appearance of numbers, and to bring the rest of her force, under cover all the way if that were possible, to the rear of our sugar-loaf hill.

That attended to, he examined the oasis; and it was a sight to gladden the eyes of any man with a problem such as his not yet more than half-solved. There was an ample supply of water for a force a dozen times the size of ours, but that was almost the least attraction.

There was firewood by the camel-load, by the cord, by the ton—heaps and piles and mounds of it. A hundred women working for a month under their impatient husbands' eyes could hardly have cut that quantity.

The Avenger was evidently a foresighted conqueror. Having seized Abu Lissan and decided to make it the pushing-off place for a more ambitious campaign, he had sent firewood parties up into the hills to lay in a good store of the stuff. For firewood in any quantity is about the hardest thing to come by when campaigning in that sterile land, and doubtless the Allies had taught him in the war the benefit of getting stores piled up ahead.

Whether he had intended to transport the stuff to Abu Lissan, or to relay it by camel-loads behind his advancing army, was none of our affair. There the wood was, mostly bound together in negotiable bundles, and it was worth to Grim in that minute incalculably more than all the loot that might have been picked up by following the retreat of the Avenger's men.

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JIMGRIM measured the stuff with his eye and began to hum tunes to himself. He lit a cigaret, and whistled. He threw the cigaret away, seized hold of me, and danced a two-step all in among the piles of wood. Finally he stripped himself and took a bath in the small rock basin over which the spring bubbled musically.

When Ibrahim ben Ah requested an explanation, he sang him a little song in English about a "merry man moping mum, who asked no sup and who craved no crum, and all for the love of a la-a-a-dy." Then he climbed to the top of the hill behind, to sit and watch for Ayisha; not that any of us doubted she was coming, but that Grim wanted to form his own judgment as to whether or not the movement of her column could be seen from Abu Lissan.

Narayan Singh and I rode back then to the sugar-loaf hill to bring along the baggage-camels, for all our eatables were stowed in the loads; and if exercise, excitement and amusement do a thing to you at all, they make you hungry. I hate a diet of uncooked dates for more than two meals in succession; they're handy and all that; they'll keep you alive, and still be palatable after they've been sat on in the hot sun; yet I've noticed that the Arabs, though they boast of them, agree with me in eating in preference almost anything else that comes along.

And we had canned stuff in the camel-loads—cheese and honest coffee and good wheat bread. Have you tried wheat bread in cans? It keeps "new" for months, and there's nothing like it to campaign on.

Narayan Singh was in one of his moralizing moods. He often gets that way when something he admires takes place under his eyes, and there is time to turn the various aspects of it over in his mind.

"There is no such thing as a color-line, *sahib!*" he exclaimed suddenly, at the end of a quarter of a mile. "Nevertheless, we dark men draw it more determinedly than you white men do. But that is craziness.

"There are two sorts of men; no others. Men who naturally can. Men who can't. Jimgrim can; and there you have him. I have fought under generals who can't; and believe me, that is a costly business for the rank and file.

"There are some men to whom you could give kingdoms, and they would lose them in a week. There are others, whom you could strip as naked as a little frog—as Jimgrim was in the pool just now—and if you turn them into the desert naked, they will carve a fortune or change the country's face.

"Our Jimgrim hasn't fired a shot, and I wager he will fire none. He hasn't told his plan, and I wager he never made one. He can; and he knows he can. He goes forth; and fortune goes with him. Can you tell me the why of that?"

"Natural talent, I suppose. Training, environment, a liking for the task. I'm not good at conundrums."

"Neither am I, *sahib*. But I know this. There is a line that is not a color-line. Jimgrim is above the line, and we are below it. If you and I knew how to vault above that line, we might be green in the face with yellow whiskers, and nevertheless the world would change under our hands. By my beard and the Prophet of this people's feet,* that Jimgrim of ours could be a king if he were minded—yet he would laugh at the idea, although I have heard it said that all you Americans regard yourselves as kings.

"He could be a millionaire if he were minded; yet I think he would regard the suggestion as a joke, although I am told that every other American looks on millions as his heritage.

"Jimgrim is a man of infinite capacity, who has nothing but a babu's salary. He enjoys everything, and wants nothing. He studies all manner of men, and is amused, but covets no man's shoes. Can you explain him?"

"Seems to me you've done it pretty well," I said. "Let's hurry. Come on. I'm hungry."

We had brought the baggage-beasts to the oasis, watered them, and started to prepare a meal before Ayisha came. She left her excited command behind the sugar-loaf hill and came galloping to confer with Grim.

Excitement was too mild a word for her condition; she was in her element, and as full of fiery zeal as Joan of Arc, although I dare say the glorious Joan had more compunction and less savagery. She looked lovely in her Bedouin costume, with eyes blazing and an Amazon smile on her lips; and she was too contented to resume her quarrel with me—actually tossing me a smile of recognition as she passed.

* A scandalously irreverent expression.

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I did not hear what she said to Grim; they talked alone together by the pool; but what he said sobered her. She ate with us in silence, and the rest of us had to hustle to get our share, for her appetite wasn't what the old-fashioned finishing-schools would reckon ladylike. She could wolf bread and cheese like a stone-crusher swallowing rock.

At last, with a mouth full of food, she sprang on her camel again and departed, just as the sun seemed to rest for an instant on the rim of the western horizon, as if it were a living ball of fire hesitating to make the plunge into the unknown. It was pitch dark by the time she reached her men.

Then began about the hardest work I ever lent a hand in. Grim and the rest of us—even old Ali Baba and Ibrahim ben Ah with his silken skirts tucked up about his waist—Ayisha and her men, and the camels all toiled harder than galley-slaves to get that wood distributed.

We laid it in great heaps at intervals along the hill-top at the back of the oasis. We carried tons of it to the sugar-loaf hill, and stacked it at even distances apart in long lines extending from each side of the hill, with a liberal supply on top—and the men who toted the loads up that hill had to be threatened each time they returned. We sent several tons on camel-back to the place where Ayisha had left her outpost. And we finished the job by midnight.

Lord! And weren't we tired then? I dare wager that not one man of all those Bedouins, nor even any of our seventeen beaver-active thieves, had ever worked half as hard; no, not if you added up all the work they had ever done, and set the total against that one performance.

Grim and Ayisha did the whip-work; Grim smiling, and seeming to be everywhere at once; Ayisha cursing, coaxing, laughing, laying on the stick—and they stood it from her, Heaven knows why! They didn't know of her divorce, and that meant something; they may have reckoned they must square accounts with Ali Higg if they struck back at her; and none of them got a close enough view of Grim in the dark to realize that he wasn't the Lion of Petra.

But there was more than that. She radiated and screamed courage; the spirit was infectious.

When the job was done, we spread and lighted the bonfires. And if the Avenger, watching from his roof in Abu Lissan, hadn't believed that there was an army camped against him then, he would have had less imagination than a piece of protoplasm in the radiolarian ooze.

Some of the men were told off to keep moving in the firelight; and, seeing the general theory of the thing now readily enough, they danced and sang. It was pretty easy to imagine the Avenger's feelings; added to the anxiety of having to face what he supposed was a force of at least a thousand men, there was the natural disgust at seeing all that good store of wood go up in flame. And of course, the more they danced around the fires, the more depressed he must have felt.

SO FAR, good. A confident team is half the game; and a dejected opponent is a good proportion of the other half. But we had to be quick; for as surely as dawn should come the Avenger wouldn't have to exercise his talents much in order to discover the deception.

Grim called a midnight council under the stars, consisting of himself, Ayisha, Ibrahim ben Ah, Ali Baba, Narayan Singh and me; and he commenced proceedings by breaking his usual rule of not unfolding more than half of a plan at any time.

There wasn't anything to complain about on that occasion as far as frankness was concerned, although the plan would have suited *Huckleberry Finn* better than a man of my temperament. I like to be at handgrips with the details of a thing.

If it's to be a gamble, I prefer to see the cards dealt, as it were; and I'm constitutionally averse to any game in which there is a joker running wild. The joker was Ali Higg, the Lion of Petra. None of us could even guess what he was doing.

However, I was the only member of the party who did not view the whole plan with enthusiasm; and, having made up my mind not long before to back Grim to the limit, at least so long as I was playing his game, I kept my opinion to myself.

Ibrahim ben Ah surprized us all with his oath-embellished praise of the scheme. So much depended on him that I suppose Grim would have had to change the plan *in toto* if the old pirate had been half-hearted.

But he foresaw the opportunity of making a great name for himself as diplomatic peace-maker; and I think, too, that he

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wasn't without secret suspicion that circumstances might possibly develop in such fashion as would leave him standing in the Lion of Petra's shoes.

But nobody was half so enthusiastic as Ayisha. The names she called Grim would have made old King Nebuchadnezzar jealous. They made Ali Baba grunt contemptuously:

"*Wallahi!* I say that a woman's flattery and the voice of the devil are one!"

At that, chiefly for the sake of drawing Ali Baba, Narayan Singh came out with one of his ponderous jests:

"The woman's tongue tells no more than the triumph in her heart. Was she not alone and wretched? And is she not now loved to distraction by a Pathan of the Orakzai?"

He struck his chest as if it were a war-drum, and Ayisha almost spat at him. I think she would have, if Grim had not been between them.

"Should I stoop to a pig-Pathan," she sneered, "with a prince waiting for me?"

And she flashed her eyes at Grim in a way that made me almost as uneasy as Ali Baba was. What had Grim promised her? He was not the kind of man to break a promise.

I didn't like the look of it, or of the triumph in her eyes. Neither did Grim's enigmatic smile look reassuring as he sat there silhouetted against the crimson of the nearest fire.

However, it was time to be up and doing, and the three of us whose task was to carry the first strategical assault examined our weapons and found our camels. Five minutes later, somewhere about one o'clock of a perfect, starry night, Ibrahim ben Ah, Narayan Singh and I rode out from behind the line of fires and headed straight for Abu Lissan, with Grim's last words resounding in our ears in Arabic:

"Peace ride with you! Remember our old friend Ali Baba's motto, 'Allah makes all things easy!' *Allah ysallmak! Tammu fi hiraset Allah!*"

CHAPTER X

"Wallah! And you say she has a following of fifty men?"

THE easiest thing in the world is to affect to look down on savages. We all do it. I've traveled, and looked, and listened; but I've never found the savage yet who didn't mock at some one whose emotions he considered more primitive than his own. I never got beyond the firework stage myself, and I'm free to admit that the sight of those bonfires in a wide horseshoe curve thrilled me more thoroughly than any row of old masters that I ever gaped at in a picture gallery.

Cultural standards are arbitrary anyhow, and mostly poppycock. A stark-naked aristocrat who had nineteen wives and no misgivings, up in the Nandi Hills beyond Kapsabit, once told me that I was an obvious Philistine because I blew my nose on a handkerchief. Ever since then I have chosen my own standard and gone forward under it; and I maintain—in the teeth of Rembrandt, Velasquez, Turner, and all the host who have amused themselves with paint—that what we had staged that night was Art. It was better than theirs, and there was more of it.

It was so good to look at, blazing irregularly up and down the outline of the hills, and in a straight, low string of crimson and orange splashes across the plain, that you couldn't feel afraid—even though we were quite likely riding to our deaths. It was gorgeous; it was full of color; it made the shadows dance; it suggested the titanic shapes of those raw hills.

And it was ours; we ourselves had done it. Even if another fellow had collected the material, it was we who spread that glowing paint.

Lord! How those fires did wink and dance behind us as we rode for Abu Lissan! I don't see how any man who wasn't a genius at divination could have guessed our force at as little as a thousand men. Knowing as I did how few we really were, I drew comfort from the sight of all those fires, and felt as if an actual army corps of friends was bivouacked in the hills. Far away over to our right there glowed a minor constellation, where Ayisha's outpost kept vigil; and if that didn't represent another thousand men at least, I don't see how any one in Abu Lissan was to know it.

But there was this to consider: The more afraid our fires had made the Avenger and his men, the greater the danger to us in approaching. Men in a panic fire wildly at the slightest sound.

Nor could we afford the time to creep up cautiously to the ruined walls and announce ourselves as white-flag bearers from some

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safe hiding-place among the shadows. Grim had made no secret of the fact that we were taking a horribly long chance.

But I suppose our time hadn't come yet. Fortune favored us. Ibrahim ben Ah was, of course, a nominal fatalist by religion, and an opportunist by conviction and habit. I'm both or neither, I don't know which; except that, as I've said, "I've observed" that fortune favors the right side as a rule. Narayan Singh is a soldier, which is not a profession but a creed, whoever maintains the contrary; his viewpoint was peculiar to the sub-denomination that he follows:

"Many a man has stumbled on good fortune in the dark simply because he dared go forward. It is only they who wait for chances to whom chances never come."

Three points of view being superior to one apparently, we rode together into a perfect trap that proved to be our salvation.

The Avenger, scared though he was, had retained a modicum of common sense. We discovered afterward that he had tried to rally a skirmishing-force that should unmask whatever might lurk behind those fires, but his men had threatened to mutiny at the first suggestion of it.

So he had had to content himself with minor precautions, and had managed to persuade a few score men that for the sake of their own skins it would be wise to go out on picket duty in the shadow of some sand-hills half a mile beyond the walls.

They were so appalled by our illuminations that they huddled all together in one dark spot. And they kept so quiet for fear of calling attention to themselves that we never even suspected their presence, or we could very easily have given them a wide berth.

As it was, they saw us, counted us, and held their fire, because bullets in the dark have a way of killing camel instead of rider. Camels taken alive are profitable loot; dead ones are only carrion. Dead men more often than not leave blood-feuds to be fought or settled with their relations whereas living prisoners may be held to ransom—besides which, you can cut their throats at any time.

So we were swooped on suddenly in the utter darkness of a gap between two mounds, dragged from our camels, and would have been disarmed if Ibrahim ben Ah hadn't found his tongue and the voice of authority. Age has its recompenses, even in the dark. They respected his age where they might have gagged and bound Narayan Singh and me; and once he had a hearing experience made him convincing.

He called them sons of sixty dogs, of course. You begin most victorious arguments with that in Arabic. Then he cursed their mothers, wives, daughters and female relatives in general for several generations either way, before beginning on their fathers, brothers, uncles, sons and probable descendants—whom he pitied, because Allah wouldn't. He then called down a murrain on their cattle, and a desecration on their grandsires' graves, which he hoped would be used by imported sows as nests for raising families.

He was going on to tell them what would happen to their livers, hearts and kidneys in the world to come, when they implored him to desist, and asked him to explain what he was doing, and what he wanted.

So he assured them they were fools and heretics, without good sense in this world or any decent prospects in the world to come.

"Who but a son of a pig and a snake would dream of pulling *me* from a camel?" he stormed at them. "Who but the offspring of asses and thorns would suspect three men in such a place, riding straight forward, as possible enemies?

"Are ye the Avenger's men? *Wallahi*, he is well served! What will he say when he learns that his invited guest has been put to this indignity by the sons of his dung-hill builders in the dark under his very walls?"

They were impressed, but still suspicious. They asked him for further information, and he gave it:

"Ye shall be crucified to the last man! Ye shall be flayed and beaten! Ye shall be cast to the kites, without a grave between the lot of you for the jackals to come and desecrate!

"Who am I? By Allah! Take me to the Avenger, and ask him who I am! Hear what he says, ye sons of promiscuous mothers!"

Whatever his generalship in the field, he knew those ropes all right. They gave him back his camel, and us ours as a natural corollary. They apologized. They begged a blessing from him to offset the curses he had showered so liberally. They promised him protection as far as the Avenger's door, and implored him to say a kind word for them to their tyrannical master.

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Neither Narayan Singh nor I said one word during the whole interlude, which I dare say cost us ten valuable minutes, but introduced us without further trouble to the Avenger's front door. They gave us a guard of a dozen men, who rode before us shouting to the watchers on the walls to hold their fire; and the only opposition we encountered entering Abu Lissan was the snarling of about a hundred scavenger dogs that made enough noise to deafen you.

Ibrahim ben Ah was so careful to ride first, and so short with me when I called out to ask whether he had been hurt in any way when they dragged him from his camel, that I began to suspect him of contemplating a treachery. We were going to be hard put to it in that case to find a way of putting through Grim's plan, to say nothing of the individual risk to Narayan Singh and me.

But it was too late then to stop and catechize him, so we rode in through a dark hole that might have been a gap in a wall, or a gate, or the mouth of —— itself, for all you could see of it. There were men on guard there, for we could hear them; and your nose informed you that the dogs hadn't attended to the sanitation any too efficiently. A backward glance at those reassuring fires of ours was the only comfort to be had.

There wasn't any reason that looked substantial just then why Ibrahim ben Ah should even regard as treachery the betrayal of Narayan Singh and me. True, he had eaten salt with Grim, not under duress, before witnesses; and likely had too high an opinion of himself to overlook that.

But Narayan Singh and I were in a different case. We had submitted him to violence, deprived him of his liberty, and—although we had been at pains to save his face for him before his own men—we hadn't spared his private feelings much on that occasion. He had eaten no salt with us two—an omission for which I felt inclined to blame Grim in the circumstances.

People who attach such high importance to the ceremony are almost always splitters of fine hairs when it comes to interpreting the spirit of agreements. He might easily consider it within his privilege to denounce us, while going through the farce of loyalty to Grim.

So I did a thing I have often done in advance of awkward situations. I put my pistol out of sight. If Ibrahim ben Ah intended treachery, then I also had a right to my intentions.

If any effort should be made to disarm me, I proposed to hand over my rifle, bandoleer and knife without any argument. Thereafter, whatever else might happen subsequently, Ibrahim ben Ah was going to get one nickel-coated bullet through the brain.

I would have liked to caution him, as a matter of fair play. But as that would have called his attention to the fact that I had hidden the pistol, it was out of the question. Besides, it was wholly up to him. He was in no kind of danger from me as long as he behaved himself.

I got a chance to whisper to Narayan Singh as we rode through the stinking, narrow streets; but there wasn't much that I could teach that man about taking care of himself. He had already hidden his revolver.

"If I am to die in this ill-smelling hole, the Avenger and some of his men will journey with me into the beyond, in addition to Ibrahim ben Ah!" he answered.

WE HALTED in front of a stout wooden door set deep in a solid wall; and evidently word had gone ahead of us, for we were admitted without a moment's delay, and were led up two flights of rickety stairs to a flat roof. The men who had brought us wanted to come too, but were driven down from the roof by three of the Avenger's staff with a storm of mixed invectives and reproaches.

The Avenger, armed to the teeth, was sitting near the center of the roof on a big chest covered with a rug. There was a lantern on a chair near by that showed his features clearly, and the first thing that struck me about him was that he was handsome, and not ill-natured.

The scar, of which Ali Higg had boasted as having spoiled his face, was there, but not nearly so prominent as I expected. Perhaps three inches long, it crossed his right cheek as far as the nose; and though the cartilage of his nose seemed to have been severed, he had either had good luck or else the services of a skilful surgeon, for it had healed pretty neatly.

For the rest, he was a dark-bearded man of middle height, with dark, lustrous eyes and splendid shoulders, who sat upright,

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with no apparent tendency to take things easy. He had a carved silver cigaret-box on the rug beside him, but no water-pipe; and though his dress was of fine material, there was no display of jewelry—no effeminacy. His hands were strong and well shaped, moving deliberately without unnecessary twitching of the fingers.

"*Salamun alaikl*" said Ibrahim ben Ah, bowing, very dignified.

He murmured something in reply, and asked why we had brought our weapons.

"Who should take them from us? I am Ibrahim ben Ah, commander of the camel corps of Ali Higg, the Lion of Petra."

"Do you come in peace?"

"I come under the rules of warfare, relying on your honor's honor. I come as a friend, if may be; but if my words find not approval, I shall ask permission to return as I came, unmolested."

The Avenger bowed his head slightly.

"Be seated. No, not in front of me; sit this way. There, now tell me what that means."

He did not point; in fact, he made no unnecessary gestures. He nodded in the direction of our bonfires in the distance, and I decided that I liked him. There was something fine and manly about his bearing and whole attitude.

The members of his staff were watching us from the stair-head with fingers on their triggers; but after that first question about our weapons the Avenger himself never referred to them again, nor acted as if he were aware of them.

"Who laid those fires?" he demanded.

"The Lion of Petra's men," said Ibrahim ben Ah.

"How many men has he then?"

"By Allah, I haven't counted."

"He has received a reenforcement?"

"Behold! Surely a reenforcement!"

"Whence?"

"God give your honor long life. I am not allowed to say."

"*Malaish*. From El-Kerak, I suppose, or possibly El-Maan. What have you come for?"

"*Inshallah*, to talk peace.'

"Peace? Why peace, with such an army at your back? Peace is it, or treachery?"

"Your honor has favored me more than once with overtures by messenger. Your honor invited me to cross over with all my men and take service under you."

"You propose to do that?"

"God forbid! I have eaten the Lion's salt. Nevertheless, I am not your honor's enemy. It was fitting in the circumstances that I should carry offers of peace."

The Avenger glanced once, swiftly at Narayan Singh and me.

"Why do you bring Indians with you?" he demanded.

That was Ibrahim ben Ah's opportunity, if he had any idea in his head of squaring personal accounts with us two. We were simply there to keep an eye on him. A polite request to have us tossed off the roof would most likely be complied with, after which he would still be in position to go through with Grim's plan. As for explanations afterward, who was likely to make much fuss about the lives of a couple of Indians?

The idea crossed his mind all right. He hesitated. Fortunately Narayan Singh and I were seated just a foot or so behind him, one on either side, in a line at right angles to the Avenger's seat and facing the suspicious staff. The Avenger himself wasn't looking, and none else could have seen the pistol that I thrust into Ibrahim's ribs under cover of my cloak, nor the revolver that touched a corresponding ticklish spot on the Sikh's side.

It may be possible to mistake the feel of a pistol muzzle on a dark night, but he didn't. He went straight ahead with the plan as Grim had outlined it, omitting nothing and introducing no personal vendettas.

"They belong to Jimgrim's force," he said in a hurry. "Jimgrim sent them as his representatives."

"Jimgrim?" exclaimed the Avenger, startled. "Where is the man? I had news of him from the southward; it was definite."

"He is this side of those fires," Ibrahim answered.

The Avenger glanced at me incredulously, but I confirmed the statement. If our plan was going forward, it was true.

"Why doesn't Jimgrim come and see me, instead of keeping company with such a dog as Ali Higg?" the Avenger asked suddenly. "I have nothing against Jimgrim. Why does he consort with my enemy?"

"He doesn't," I answered.

"Where is the Lion of Petra then—as the upstart calls himself?"

"Possibly Jimgrim knows, but we don't," I answered.

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"Then is that army not marching against me?"

"At present it stands still," said I. "Jimgrim is doing his best to prevent hostilities."

"Why doesn't he come and see me?"

"He has not been invited; nor has he a safe-conduct."

"One of you go back and bring him. Let that day not come that shall see me refusing to confer with Jimgrim! He shall have fifty men to escort him safely through my lines, and if we do not agree together he shall depart in peace at dawn."

"Jimgrim has the task of restraining Ali Higg's army," I answered. "There is only one condition on which he will come."

"Name it."

"That you agree beforehand to make peace with Ali Higg, not on Ali Higg's terms, but on Jimgrim's."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then," said I, "your honor must deal with that army on your own responsibility. It will not be possible for Jimgrim to keep them waiting there many hours. It was only with difficulty that they were restrained from pursuing your honor's men a while ago.

"Hitherto they have listened to him, but he will dare to leave them only on the condition I have named. If your honor will put in writing an agreement to make peace on Jimgrim's terms, then he will come forward"

"But if he is on this side of the fires, how will that army know that I have yielded that point?" he asked suspiciously.

"If your honor will set it down in writing and hand the writing over to Ibrahim ben Ah, then it has been arranged that I shall make a signal that will be understood by all."

He sat in gloomy meditation for about five minutes before answering.

"What if I hold you three as hostages, and retire from Abu Lissan?" he asked suddenly.

That being a poser, it was my turn to meditate. None of us had an answer ready. I could have told him it would be a breach of faith to treat messengers in that way, but there isn't much to be gained, as a rule, by imputing bad faith in advance of the occurrence.

"That would not prevent pursuit," I said at last, "but it *would* lose you the good offices of Jimgrim."

"You mean he would——"

"I mean," I interrupted, "you would have to make what terms you could with your enemies, instead of signing peace on a friend's conditions."

"Conditions? What conditions will he make?"

"Who am I that I should answer that?" I replied. "You, who know Jimgrim, should be able to judge whether he will be fair with you or not."

"Jimgrim and I are brothers. He did me a favor once," he muttered half-aloud; then relapsed again into silence, and was silent for so long a time that I began to be nervous about the hour.

We had only until dawn to succeed; sunlight would show the skeleton on which our glittering display was spread.

"Try Jimgrim again," I suggested at last; and for answer he clapped his hands together.

One of the staff brought him paper and pen, and at Ibrahim ben Ah's dictation he signed a statement "in the name of Allah, the all-merciful, the compassionate" that he would agree to Jimgrim's terms if Jimgrim would come and hold the balance squarely between himself and Ali Higg.

He did not whine, squeal, wriggle, swear, seek to excuse himself, equivocate or make any fuss at all, but acted throughout manfully, ordering coffee to be brought as soon as he had signed the paper, and behaving generally like a gentleman, making the most of temporary failure. I was right glad to know he was being restrained from conquest that would inevitably bring him up against British artillery sooner or later.

I TOOK the lantern off the chair and swung it in a circle round my head for several minutes, until five shots from a pistol cracked out much nearer at hand than I had expected—so near, in fact, that I went on signaling, believing it could not be Grim.

But Grim, too, had been growing nervous about the hour, and had crept close in order to waste as little time as possible. The Avenger sent two of his staff to meet him and prevent accidents, and inside ten minutes Grim came up the stairs, not alone, but followed, of all improbable people, by Ayisha.

She hadn't been included in the plan as far as I knew; but Lord, how she was

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enjoying herself! What with her rifle and bandoleer, Amazon smile and blazing eyes, she looked as picturesque by lanternlight as any woman I have ever seen.

Grim stood smiling at the stair-head for thirty seconds, until the Avenger called out a sonorous greeting and rose to his feet to receive him. They seized each other's hands, and then embraced in the Arab style, which is Biblical.

"Once before, O Jimgrim, you came to my aid in a tight place. Do you bring peace now?"

"If you are swift," Grim answered, turning so as to face the undulating line of fires. "I can hold those men there until dawn—no longer."

"Let us talk then. I am in no shape just now to fight an army such as that. *Mashallah*, what locusts! They have eaten up in one night a year's supply of wood!"

Grim turned from admiring our illuminations, and sat down in front of him. Hassan Saoud the Avenger set both elbows on his thighs, and sat still, resting his jaws on the heels of both hands.

"Do you remember, at the time when I sent you those camels in the tight place you speak of, how I tricked you?" Grim asked him.

"*Wallah!* Yes. Ha-ha! I never will forget it! It called for a cunning fox indeed to play that trick on me—and a wise one! I would have plundered Feisul's baggage but for you; and the Turks would have caught me in the bargain. That was a true Jimgrim trick; there is no other name for it."

"I'm going to trick you again," announced Grim.

"By Allah, I will take the chance," the Avenger answered, laughing. "Go ahead."

"I'm not joking. I want it clearly understood that I'm going to trick you. I shall take your word, Hassan Saoud, and hold you to it."

"I am no longer afraid of your tricks. I will pass my word as soon as we agree. It is several hours since I had the first inkling of this trick; there came a message from the southward, saying that Jimgrim waited in a *fiumara* twenty miles away, and begged the immediate loan of four hundred men."

"What did you do about it?" Grim asked.

He did not look particularly interested; but Ayisha, standing upright in the dark behind Grim, leaned forward on her rifle with parted lips.

"*Wallahi!*" swore the Avenger. "It sounded like a strange request to come from Jimgrim. It sounded to me like a trap of some kind. So I sent fifty men, whom I could ill spare, and a man in charge of them who should have been commanding my right wing.

"Had he been with the right wing, there might have been another tale to tell about tonight's affair. My brother Achmet. You know him? Like a rifle-bullet is Achmet for quick thinking. I said to Achmet:

" 'If the sender of that message truly is Jimgrim, then stay and serve him with your fifty. But if he is not Jimgrim, catch him and bring him hither, or else feed him to the jackals; but better to bring him alive, for the amusement we may have with him.' "

"It was very good of you, when you needed men so badly, to send your best wing-commander and fifty on the off chance of helping me," Grim answered gravely. "Let us call the account even between us, and begin all over anew."

"*Taib**—since you suggest it."

I began to feel horribly uneasy, and I know Narayan Singh did, for he was holding his breath and letting it out between his teeth sibilantly. I knew Grim was playing a hunch by the way he smiled and spoke slowly with his eyes not quite wide open; you learn to recognize a man's game after you have played with him a while and watched him in the climaxes.

But hunches are fickle friends. If the Lion of Petra should have been killed by the Avenger's brother, all our plan was worth nothing; and if he had been made prisoner, it looked like worse than nothing.

But Grim had to be quick. Before so very long now those fires of ours would begin paling in the dawn.

"Well then," Grim said slowly, "do you wish me to act arbiter in this dispute between you and Ali Higg?"

"Yes; for he seems too strong for me."

There was a long pause at that moment. Several shots were fired in the near distance toward the south. Shouting followed for two or three minutes; and then silence. I judged by the slow movement of his hands that Grim was horribly excited, but he had his voice under command.

"If I can call off that army then, will you agree to retire from Abu Lissan at once, and

* *All right.*

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not to invade Ali Higg's territory for a period of three years?"

"Three years is a long time, Jimgrim."

"Nevertheless, my condition is three years."

There was another pause—the sound of a camel coming full pelt through the narrow streets—and then a disturbance in front of the door below.

"Make it one year, Jimgrim. I am a man of my word."

"Three years; or I wash my hands of the whole business."

The Avenger hesitated—stared at our fires for several seconds—seemed to review in his mind his own immediate resources—and was about to speak, when a brown-cloaked rifleman was ushered in a hurry up the stairs and advanced to deliver his message with hardly the form of salutation. He was out of breath, and brushed Ayisha aside as if he did not see her.

He was from the Avenger's brother. He reported that the person representing himself to be Jimgrim had tried to decoy him and his fifty men farther afield, but had been cornered, because he and his handful of men were mounted on dead-weary camels. At the moment of the messenger's dispatch the man, whoever he was, was parleying for terms, offering to surrender if his life was guaranteed him.

So the Avenger's brother had decided to grant that condition in order to save time; but there would be delay, because of those tired camels, which were, nevertheless, too good to leave behind. He hoped to bring in his prisoners before dawn, in time to take part in the offensive.

"*Taib*," said the Avenger, and dismissed him with a wave of the hand.

Ayisha went and sat down in the circle of lamplight, with an air that I mistook for resignation. Her face wore that fatalistic expression that you read about and very seldom see. Ibrahim ben Ah, looking rather triumphant and decidedly shrewd, whispered to Grim, who shook his head.

If you had asked me to play Grim's hand that minute, I would have thrown the cards down, for the arrival of Ali Higg on the scene as a prisoner of war would be a joker that would upset every calculation. Yet Grim looked uncommonly contented, and the Avenger, whose turn it was to deal, dealt the joker into Grim's hand.

"*Inshallah*, we shall have amusement, Jimgrim, when we confront you with the impostor!"

"Business before amusement, Hassan Saoud," Grim answered. "Will you agree to the three-year term of peace?"

"But if I agree, how shall Ali Higg be held to it? Will he give hostages? What proof will the scoundrel give that he intends to keep his word?"

Ayisha's eyes, that had been half-closed dreamily, opened wide at that, and the suspicion of a smile began to hover on her lips.

"Would a wife and fifty men do?" Grim inquired.

"The loss of fifty men would weaken him," said the Avenger.

"And the wife knows his affairs, knows his strength and weakness, and moreover involves his personal honor," answered Grim. "Do you not remember how the Prophet Mohammed required his follower Ali's wife as a token of allegiance? Would even Ali Higg dare to make himself a by-word through all this land by breaking an agreement to confirm which he had given his wife before witnesses? If a man should lose his wife in battle, his honor would require him to seek revenge; but can he give his wife, and break faith afterward?"

"And what does he require of me?"

"Three years' peace."

"And at the end of that?"

"A lot can happen in three years," said Grim. "Let us plan for those, and leave the fourth in Allah's lap."

"Is the wife good-looking?"

"Judge for yourself," Grim answered; and Ayisha rose to her feet.

She looked less like a part of a bargain than the clever driver of one—dignified, alert, triumphant.

"*Wallah!* And you say she has a following of fifty men?"

"There are fifty who are willing to change sides along with her and bring their camels."

"*Taib!* I agree."

"To what?" demanded Grim.

"To a three-year truce."

"Does that include personal immunity for Ali Higg? Do you undertake to lift no hand against him, and to take him at no disadvantage at any time during the next three years, beginning now, in return for a similar promise from him to you?"

"By Allah, why not? He marked my face; but I have his wife, and shall have

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fifty men! Yes, I agree. I promise. Why doesn't the dog show himself and sign the bargain?"

"He shall," said Grim.

"But when? Let my men go and bring him."

"Men have gone for him already," answered Grim. "He will be here presently. So you have passed your word? Between you and me, as man to man, in good faith? I may count on you to keep it?"

"In the name of Allah. By my beard and by the honor of my race," the Avenger answered.

CHAPTER XI

"I see no sin in holding to my given word. Let Allah judge me."

DAWN was just breaking when they brought in Ali Higg. Our beautiful row of fires was dwindling into dots of smokiness. I went through the farce of waving lantern signals to a fantom thousand men, although another twenty minutes was going to prove their non-existence; and we got in a row, staff-officers and all, to receive the prisoner.

I can't say which was more astonished—Ali Higg at sight of Grim, Ayisha and Ibrahim ben Ah, or the Avenger at discovering the prisoner's identity.

"By the Prophet's beard and my feet, this is a worse trick than I thought!" growled the Avenger.

And he glared at Ali Higg for several minutes, while his brother Achmet gave an account of the capture and what preceded it.

"He left a man in wait for us, by Allah, who swore that Jimgrim waited at a place ahead, whence he would lead us to Ali Higg's flank in such manner that his capture would be easy. But it sounded like strange talk to me; so I kept the man with me, and rode hard.

"We overtook this person who pretended he was Jimgrim. I passed my word not to kill him, and he surrendered. Lo! It was Ali Higg, who had thrown himself on my protection.

"He has not told me why Ali Higg should offer to betray Ali Higg by leading us on to Ali Higg's flank that we might capture Ali Higg—nor why he should call himself Jimgrim. Now make him tell.

"I promised him his life, but said nothing about torture. Moreover, there was nothing said about his men; if they were bastinadoed——"

"He only had a little private difference with me," said Grim. "I have the key to his private fortune in my pocket. As long as I have that he can't make war without losing fifty thousand pounds. I suppose his wife, Jael, persuaded him. It seemed simple to her to use the Avenger's men to waylay me. But Allah doesn't make all things easy for every one. Jael suggested, but the Lion of Petra bungled."

No one else spoke for several minutes. Ali Higg hardly resembled Grim any longer, for he was too dejected, besides being utterly fagged from the pain in his neck, his prodigious ride, and want of sleep. It would have been an act of charity to tell him to sit down, but the Avenger wasn't feeling charitable just then.

His face was black with anger, and the blackness deepened as he glared at the distant hills and began to realize the extent of the whole trick that Grim had played on him. There was smoke there now, and nothing else. The men had all disappeared behind the sugar-loaf hill, whence they could scoot for Petra at the first alarm.

Grim leaned forward at last, and took a cigaret from the Avenger's silver box. He lighted it casually before breaking the silence, and then it was to Ali Higg that he spoke, not to the Avenger.

"O Ali Higg," he said, "I've made a bargain for you with Hassan Saoud the Avenger, who is a man of his word, although he doesn't like the bargain. There is to be peace between you two for three years. It extends to persons. His person is to be inviolable; so is yours.

"To bind the bargain, and in token of good faith, I have told him that you will give him your wife Ayisha, along with any fifty men who care to follow her fortune, camels and all. He undertakes not to invade your territory; you undertake not to invade his. This place Abu Lissan as far as both water-holes to the northward is to be neutral ground. Are you ready to sign?"

Ali Higg nodded. I think he was afraid that if he spoke he might wake up and find the good luck only a dream. He glanced once sharply at Ayisha, but made no sign to her—gave her no nod of recognition, although she met his eyes boldly.

At last the Avenger spoke, and in the

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dawn-light his face looked gray with grief and disappointment.

"I will sign the agreement with this dog who calls himself a Lion, Jimgrim; for I swore by Allah, and by the Prophet's beard, and by the honor of my race. I will take his wife, for she is good to look at, and has fifty men. The men will find better employment under me than under the Dog of Petra. *Taib.* Let a deed of peace be drawn accordingly, and I will sign it.

"But how about the issue between thee and me, Jimgrim? It was your suggestion that the account between us should be reckoned as balanced. Therefore we stand as two men not beholden to each other. As between you and me personally there has been no agreement made, nor oath passed, either as to your life or any other matter."

"Have one of my cigarets," Grim answered calmly. "They're better than yours."

The Avenger waved the offer aside indignantly.

"I call myself Avenger. None has proven to me yet that that is not my name."

Narayan Singh's eye caught mine, and he patted the part of his cloak that concealed the revolver. I made ready, too; but Grim didn't seem in the very least disturbed.

"Very well, friend Saoud. I told you beforehand that I was going to trick you. If the account was even just now, let's admit that the balance between us has swung in your favor. I'm no more a *maskin** than you are. I'll consider I owe you a turn. How's that?"

"Such talk is easy. You have robbed me in the first place of a conquest; second, of a prisoner whom I would rather hold than any in Arabia; third, you have made a fool of me."

"Not so," said Grim, still smiling his seductivest. "I've made a fool of Ali Higg—saved you from destruction by a British army—provided you with a beautiful wife—and added fifty men with camels to your army, without your having to strike a blow for them. Now since you think the scales are still too low on my side, I say, 'Name your own makeweight'."

"By ——, Jimgrim, your life would never be enough to balance this!"

"Of course it wouldn't. I'd be no use to you dead."

"By Allah, I have known revenge to taste sweet!"

It was in keeping with Grim's usual tact that he was silent on the subject of the British, who would certainly have exacted retribution, severe, though possibly indirect, from any sheikh who caused him to be slain. He chose a different line of argument.

"See here, Hassan Saoud, you're too fine a fellow altogether to give way to ill-temper now. Smile, and shake hands. You've got the right now to call on me in an emergency; I'll keep my word as well as you keep yours."

"You mean you will come if I call on you?"

"*Inshallah,*" answered Grim. "I can't do impossibilities. But if you call, and it's possible, I'll come."

"And do as I bid you?"

Grim laughed aloud and reached for another of the Avenger's cigarets.

"Here, take one of mine. No, you optimist! If I were to do what you told me to, we'd both be in a British jail within the week. What I do mean is, that if you're in a bad mess at any time, and if it's humanly possible, I'll come and help you out."

Well, that Avenger fellow was the nearest approach to a sportsman that I had seen yet in that part of the world, if you except our old fox, Ali Baba, and his sixteen performing thieves. He laughed, and decided to make the best of matters—in the teeth of opposition, too; for his staff officers and his brother Achmet argued for an hour, going so far at last as to produce a *m'allim,* very learned in Koranic law, who maintained stoutly that to fulfil any agreement imposed on him by the trickery of an infidel would be to set a bad example, and therefore sin.

"I see no sin in holding to my given word," he answered finally. "Let Allah judge me."

AFTER that all of us except Ayisha ate breakfast together on the roof—women don't eat with the men—and a devilish nasty mess it was, concocted of rice, powdered coconut, camel-butter, turmeric and the flesh of a goat that had been bleating less than an hour before. The Avenger went through the form of eating salt with Ali Higg, but without enthusiasm, and insisted on referring to him as the Dog of Petra.

* Miserable specimen—*i. e.,* poor sport.

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Then Grim drew up the agreement in triplicate, to which we all attached our signatures; and I don't know what law I broke, or what the penalty should be, but I set down an Indian name in the place reserved for me, and gave my address as Lahore, Punjab, India.

Since we were all dog-tired it was agreed that we should sleep the day through in Abu Lissan, and all of us go our separate ways that evening. Grim would have been quite contented to take the Avenger's word for our safety, and so would I; but when word was sent to Ali Baba about it, he turned up within the hour with his sons and grandsons, and insisted on their taking one-hour turns on guard.

"For men are like camels in this: That they dream dreams," he remarked dryly. "One who should dream that he was murdered while he slept might possibly not wake again."

So they spread rugs and mats on the floor of the long second-floor passage, and we sent up such a chorus of snores as I dare say that roof had never echoed to before. But I know the Avenger didn't sleep much, and don't suppose Ayisha did. The Avenger sat in conference in a small room with the *m'allim*, discussing all the intricacies of marriage to another man's wife.

Fortunately the Avenger had only three wives, and the Koran permits four; fortunately, too, the Prophet Mohammed had set the precedent, by demanding the young wife of his faithful follower, Ali, and, better still, obtaining her.

The *m'allim* said it was good doctrine that the willingness of Ali Higg to part with her constituted full divorce, and whether or not duress might have had anything to do with his consent made no difference. The lady's preferences having no kind of bearing on the case, Ayisha was not consulted.

But she was satisfied—no doubt of that. I think she admired Grim more than any man she had ever known; but tribal history was in her veins, as it is in every man's and woman's.

What she wanted was an influential husband, and she had one, for which she was as grateful to Grim as a stray cat for a saucer of milk. It was up to her to establish a position for herself among the senior wives, and by the look in her eye I should say she felt like doing it.

About four in the afternoon she asked leave of the Avenger to go and select the fifty men who were to constitute her dowry. Ali Higg demanded to go with her, to prevent her taking all the best; so Grim went too, and our whole party rode with Grim to prevent any last-minute treachery on the Lion's part.

It was a good job that we all went in the circumstances. There was a new arrival behind that sugar-loaf hill, and a real reenforcement after all. Jael Higg, constitutionally restless, opportunist always, huntress with all hounds and runner with all hares in sight—everlastingly haunted, too, by doubt of Ali Higg's ability—had scraped together every last man Petra could produce, and brought them to the scene, trusting to her own sharp wit to use them to the best advantage. She had scraped together nearly fifty, including some women, but they were a rather bob-tailed lot and their camels were living skeletons.

Ali Higg tried to avoid her, but there wasn't much of the retiring arbutus about Jael. She tackled him in front of us all, and tongue-lashed him bitterly when she had dragged the story out of him, he trying in return to assert his overlordship, but with small success. The part that seemed to sting her most was the discovery that Grim had all along retained that order on the bank.

She advanced toward him with her thin lips quivering nervously, and cold hatred glaring from her eyes; and we all closed in, to prevent murder.

"So you kept that letter, did you? Clever, aren't you, Jimgrim! You've fooled me at every turn, haven't you? Proud, aren't you, to have me in money-hobbles for three years to come? Very well; you won this time, but wait and see!"

"I've left you lots to build with, Jael, if you'll only build to the line," he answered kindly.

"Left me lots—and fifty men and camels to go with that wandering gipsy Ayisha? Bah! You've skinned me to the bone. Ayisha may take these that I brought with me today."

But Ayisha was already choosing her contingent, and there was no reluctance to be chosen. Changing to the stronger side and a less irascible leader had its obvious advantages. Jael rushed off to interfere, and Ayisha cocked her rifle instantly.

Quick work by Ali Baba's men prevented

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that duel. Half a dozen of them pounced on Jael from behind and pinned her arms behind her, and the rest got in position to spoil Ayisha's aim. Ayisha threatened to shoot through them, but they laughed at her, and at a word from Grim she put her rifle up. Then Grim went and stood in front of Jael, but did not tell Ali Baba's men to let go her hands.

"See here, Jael, old girl," he said, "you're nervous and jumpy. You'll be doing something you'll regret if you don't watch points. Suppose you take that Lion of yours and your remaining men, and head straight back for Petra before you make your trouble any worse."

"Let me go, then."

"Say the word, Jimgrim, and we cut her throat," Ali Baba called out from behind.

Beyond holding his hand up as a signal for nothing doing, Grim did not answer. He walked up to Ali Higg instead, and ordered him to take his men away. The Lion obeyed readily enough; he was sick of the whole business, and desperately eager to get back into his cave, where he could growl himself into better spirits.

There was delay at the last minute, owing to the fact that many more than fifty men, including Ibrahim ben Ah, wanted to stay with Ayisha; but Ayisha had chosen her contingent and lined them up. Grim gave the rest thirty seconds to start after Ali Higg. He didn't say what the consequences would be if they refused; but there were a couple of hundred of the Avenger's men within hail, and they might imagine what they liked.

WHEN the last of the Lion's men was about two hundred yards away Grim ordered Jael released and her camel brought to her. Ali Baba wanted to keep her weapons, but Grim disallowed that. She mounted and rode away without a word of farewell, and Ali Baba croaked out his opinion that hornet's stings are usually in their tails. But Grim laughed.

Jael did turn once, at about two hundred yards' range, and threaten Grim with her rifle; but as every single one of Ali Baba's men promptly took aim at her she thought better of it.

"We've not had quite the last of that lady, I suspect; she still has one chance left, and overlooks no bets," said Grim.

That one chance was obviously to waylay us on our road home; and, seeing that Grim had added fifty to his force, the Avenger was kind enough to offer us an escort of a hundred men as far as the British frontier. But if Grim had agreed to that there would have been a fight in all likelihood, which in itself would constitute excuse for treating the signed agreement as a scrap of paper. If only one shot were fired by Jael's men, the Avenger would interpret that as breach of faith and act accordingly.

So Grim insisted on the treaty being carried out in full. We said good-by to the Avenger and Ayisha, and stood by at dusk to see the whole force file southward out of Abu Lissan.

The Avenger's last words as he shook Grim's hand were ominous:

"By Allah and the Prophet's body, Jimgrim, I shall hold thee to our terms! If no occasion rises to summon thee to my aid in a difficulty, may Allah change my face and roll me in the dust unless I make one!"

Ayisha didn't forget her obligations. She came and kissed Grim's hand, and gave him her amber necklace.

"If I have a new husband and am once more a princess, I am none the less beholden to thee for it," she said prettily.

And because Grim didn't know quite what to do about the necklace and was obviously embarrassed, Narayan Singh came to the rescue with one of his heavy-handed jests:

"By my teeth and the Prophet's belly!" he boomed impiously. "Princess thou mayest be; but I am a Pathan of the Orakzai! Let this be the Avenger's hour, and let him make the most of it; for as surely as the moon will shine tonight—as surely as thine eyes are worth a ransom—I will slay ninety and nine Avengers—aye! And burn Arabia for one more look into Ayisha's eyes!"

The Avenger overheard that, and felt rather flattered. He tossed back over his shoulder a mocking invitation to Narayan Singh to come and fight him single-handed for the girl at any time. So we all parted in a rare good-temper, Ayisha having the last word, as a lady should.

"A Pathan is a pig, but thou art not so bad as some pigs!" she called back to Narayan Singh; and thereafter, all the way back home to El-Kalil, the gang kept chaffing him unmercifully about different breeds of pigs, pretending to wonder wherein he was so obviously different from the rest.

But that was because they knew he was

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a Sikh, and that the Sikhs don't object to pigs at all. If he had really been a Pathan those jokes would have cost a life or two.

We were a whole day longer on the road home than if we had taken the shortest way. Grim led us over a waterless route to the southward; and the proof of the wisdom of that was the sight we had of a party of camel-men, led almost certainly by Jael Higg, who reached a ravine too late to intercept us. For about an hour they followed in hot pursuit and then, giving up the chase, sat their camels on a ridge five miles away and watched us gloomily until we disappeared from view.

Spirits rose high after that; for the danger was all behind and El-Kalil in front, with the *suk* and the coffee-shops, where Ali Baba and his sons and grandsons could boast and lie to their hearts' content about our lawless doings.

Mahommed, the gang poet, rose to the occasion nobly with an epic song of our adventure; and being a poet, of course he wasn't hampered by any such trivialities as facts. If a story is worth singing, it is worth enlarging on; so he enlarged, to everybody's satisfaction. I remember a few stanzas; he sang the story part, composing as he went along, and we all thundered the refrain:

"Saoud the Avenger—
Sing of the Avenger!—
Akbar the Avenger!—
Struck the earth in anger,
Swore an oath in anger,
Vowed before his captains
He will harry Ali Higg!
Akbar the Avenger!
Down with Ali Higg!

Saoud the Avenger—
Sing of the Avenger!
Akbar the Avenger!—
Summoned all his camel-men,
Made the desert dark with them;
Twenty-five machine-guns
Sent he in advance.
Tap-ap-ap machine-guns
Sent he in advance!

Half a hundred captains—
Each he had a squadron;
Half a hundred squadrons!—
Swore to do his bidding;
Allah bear them witness,
They will enter Petra,
The hold of Ali Higg!
Burn and plunder Petra,
The hold of Ali Higg!
Akbar the Avenger! Akbar the Avenger!
He shall eat up Petra,
The abode of Ali Higg!

Lo! The Lion of Petra—
Ha! the Lion of Petra!
Ali Higg of Petra!—
Rose and cursed in answer
Swearing by the Prophet,
Father of a thousand boils,
Father of a rage!
Wallah! Ya, the wrath of him!
Roaring Ali Higg!

Summoned he Ayisha—
**Shellabi Ayisha,*
Starry-eyed Ayisha!—
Bade her lead his camel-men
Straight at the Avenger,
Meet him at the desert wells,
Give him battle there!
Shellabi Ayisha!
†*Shellabi kabir!*

Called he his commander—
Father of commanders,
Fiercest of commanders!—
Gave him, too, a thousand
Princes of the desert,
Bade him and Ayisha
Bring him Saoud's head!
Shellabi Ayisha!
Ibrahim ben Ah!"

It was a first-class song, with never an end to it, for Mahommed added stanza after stanza as the days wore by. It included finally a wonderful account of my defeat of Mujrim in the Valley of Moses, and Mujrim was made the hero of it by the ingenious process of ascribing fearful and supernatural qualities to me.

But the whole song was merely a setting for the wholly fictitious story of Grim's conquest in battle of the allied "thousands" of the Avenger and Ali Higg combined, winding up with a gorgeous climax, in which Grim carried off "Shellabi Ayisha" from under the eyes of both of them. Grim was the hero of the epic, and however long the song grew by day, it always ended with a final crashing chorus:

"Akbar! Akbar! Jimgrim! Jimgrim!"

We sang it all the way home, and roared it in the narrow streets of El-Kalil; and although I suppose that Homer may have been more truthful, I've a notion he is an overrated epic-builder in comparison to my friend Mahommed ben Ali Baba ben Hamza, youngest son of Ali Baba, dean of thieves and wiliest old fox in Palestine.

Sing of Mahommed—
Ben Ali ben Hamza!

*Shellabi—beautiful.
†Shellabi kabir—supremely beautiful.

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THE FURIES

by F. ST. MARS

Author of "Ol' Makaw," "Union Is Strength," etc.

THE underkeeper looked at the "rearing-field" with a smile upon his scornful lips. He was one of those farm laborers who imagines that he can take a keeper's place, and fill it, without first serving due apprenticeship, the fact being that his giant bulk alone got him his post. The headkeeper had just handed over to this fellow the care of the "rearing-field" for the night—a duty which entailed the guarding of some two thousand pheasant chicks, under domestic hens, in rows upon rows of coops.

"Mind thar vermin," the headkeeper had warned him; and the underling smiled the arrogant, smug smile of the ignorant.

Standing now alone by his hut, he beheld the ordered rows of coops, narrowing in dim perspective, on either hand, half seen in the ghostly light of dying day. But he could not see the eyes watching him from the frowning shadow of the wood which marched with the field.

Fierce, glittering orbs, scrutinized him hungrily—the little cruel eyes of the furtive "night hunters." For this rearing-field was known to all the nocturnal prowlers for a dozen miles round—known to the fox, the poaching cat, the stoat, the weasel, and the rat. All watched it, all hungered after those ten-thousand-odd baby pheasants. Yet, because he was ignorant, and because he had spent the previous night in playing cards, this fool of a keeper must needs fall asleep by eleven o'clock.

Seeing that the dreaded and hated apparition, man, did not go the rounds from time to time, as they had been led to expect, the "night hunters" took courage. One by one they glided from cover, and began to explore the outer rows of coops, and still no man came out from the hut. Only an alarming gurgling noise floated softly upon the night air—they knew that, or, at least, the rats and the cat knew it—the strange growl men make when they sleep.

The rats, by the by, were not near the cat, they were right at the other end of the field; they always are, if they can possibly locate "Puss" first.

All at once a small shadow appeared in the pale moonlight just without the wood. A rat, seeing it, shied back to cover in haste. The shadow moved, and revealed itself as a weasel. This creature looked, and was, so small that the lay mind might pass it over as harmless. What could a mere atom—scarcely nine inches long, and with absurdly short legs—do to harm? And yet there was no more implacable, more cruel, or more dreaded "night hunter" in all the land.

Behind that triangular-shaped head, and looking out of those peculiarly penetrating, beady eyes, worked a brain which, for lust of slaughter fearfully strengthened by sheer "Japanese courage," was unequaled in all the vast world of Nature.

In a few moments there were perhaps nine such weasels appearing, like phantoms, from nowhere in particular, quick, alert,

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masterful little creatures. Then, in a flash, they had vanished, all at the same moment, and so suddenly that one could scarce see the going of them. The invisible to us, silent order of their leader had bid them dive into mole runs, and—behold, they were gone! The mole runs, it may be said, meandered out from the wood at this spot—half-a-dozen main arteries, which spread and branched gradually out over, or under, the rearing-field, like the veins of a leaf.

When next this party of small terrors appeared, it was night out in the field among the coops. They popped up from the nether world with the same startling suddenness as before. A rat, trying to burgle a coop, fell over backward in terrified surprize. It is noticeable that, being a rat, he took good care to fall out of sight, behind the coop.

In a few minutes a cat, bound upon the same furtive affairs as the rat, came suddenly round the corner of one of the alleyways formed by the rows of coops—and stopped dead. She was not afraid of one or two weasels, having killed them before, but a pack of them on the war-path—no. Somewhere at the back of that inscrutable feline brain there, doubtless, lurked the experience of some forgotten wild ancestor concerning weasels united; so the cat melted back into the shadows again.

After some hurried explorations, to note how the land lay, the weasels again vanished. This time, however, it was but for a few seconds. They soon came up by twos and threes, and—they were inside the coops, having discovered where the mole runs ran beneath them. Thenceforward all was muffled confusion, and death moved swiftly.

First a chorus of startled "cheeps" heralded the entry of the murder, next a scuffle and the helpless scolding of a half-awake and wholly terror-stricken hen, and then—silence. It was as if some evil gnomes from the lower regions had chosen this moment for an orgy of death. And all the world around was still, and calm, and peaceful. The six-foot guardian slept calmly on, unknowing and unheeding.

It would seem that Nature had quite abandoned her weaker children, for other weasels were hastening to the spot. Abandoned, did I say? No, not quite. A form, tall and silent, appeared suddenly at the edge of the wood. It was a smart young underkeeper, who thought he would look up his mate in the rearing-field on his way home from the village. Eyes trained by long apprenticeship showed him the truth at a glance.

He saw a rat glide, dim and furtive, among the coops. He spotted an owl hovering over the pheasant-food hut, where the mice were, a poised vision, ghostly in the half light of the moon. Then a kindly puff of wind brought to his quick ears the sound of stifled confusion from where the weasels held gruesome carnival. In a very few seconds he had, with his customary noiselessness, reached the spot. He stopped, and with upraised stick, listened and peered into the shadows, trying to locate the cause of the disturbance. Was it weasels, or stoats, or rats, or what?

Almost at once his question was answered for him by the sudden appearance of a single weasel, gliding across the open with that singular undulating motion peculiar to the tribe. The stick whistled through the air and descended upon it, swift as fate. Almost in an instant the little animal was dead, but not before it had had time to utter one squealing cry, a cry vibrant with fierce agony. Instantly the ground was alive with weasels.

To say that, when he realized, as he now did for the first time, that it was a whole pack of weasels which he had to face, the keeper paused, would scarcely prove him cowardly. More than one man before now has had to rue the hour on which he faced a pack of weasels. It is not merely that these tiny creatures are agile and courageous beyond compare. It is the fact that they simply do not know fear, save for traps—but then every wild animal is born with that same instinctive terror of traps.

It was perhaps as well that the keeper paused, for one man alone could scarcely have hoped to check the depredations of a whole pack of weasels. Moreover, it is even possible that he might have had the worst of the fight.

It was as well, also, for another reason, that he hesitated, for what happened next changed the whole course of events.

AS THE young man stood there motionless, with the weasels all about him, three of the little animals made a dash at him. It so happened that directly in their path lay the body of the weasel which the keeper had just killed.

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Moreover, the three daring attackers, converging from different points, met over the corpse, and, in some extraordinary way, managed to collide.

The result was startling and incomprehensible. The three weasels commenced fighting together, and instantly, as if struck by a common impulse, all—or nearly all—of the other weasels rushed to the spot and joined in the fray. The whole thing happened with such suddenness that the keeper found himself gazing stupidly and blankly down upon a struggling mass of weasels, before he realized quite what had happened.

There they were, a piled heap, a living, tangle of squirming, fighting animals; and the extraordinary feature of it all was that not one of them uttered a sound for some time. They fought, and fought, and fought, as if all the fate of all the tribe rested upon the valor of each individual. The fact that he was there, that, in short, anything was there at all, seemed to have gone completely out of their heads. They appeared to become suddenly mad, and hurled themselves into the fight with a frenzy and pugnacity truly appalling.

At last a cry, a peculiar, long-drawn, harsh, "swearing" note, came from the center of the "scrum." It was a rather horrible sound, full of diabolical passion, and of hate. The cry seemed to be taken up, one by one, by all the weasels in the heap, and, so far as the keeper could make out, it was a "death cry." Indeed, no animal could remain in that horrible heap long, and live. Be that as it may, the signs of struggle began to subside gradually, but the heap remained intact, a conglomeration of death.

At last the mass was still, save for, now and again, the faint movement of some individual, wounded unto death, struggling to reach, and bury its fangs in, its nearest neighbor. Then at length the heap was still, every weasel had hold of another in its closed jaws, so that the whole bunch formed an inextricable tangle.

The watchers were spell-bound for long seconds after all was still—the man like a graven image; the few weasels which had not joined in, females all, standing motionless, their small eyes nearly bulging out of their heads; a rat fixed like a petrified thing, as if it, like the remaining weasels, understood the full, mysterious, and horrible meaning of it all.

Suddenly the aching silence, the painful stillness, tense as wire, was broken—was snapped. A great, rollicking shout burst the quiet asunder. The sleeping keeper had awakened, and seeing his colleague, was shouting to know what was wrong. Instantly life seemed to come back to the watchers. The rat got himself hence—effaced himself in a way rats have. The weasels plunged into the mole runs, and made all speed from the scene of horror. The man turned about slowly, like one in a dream.

He had seen one of those phenomena which now and again happen in nature. Mysterious, incomprehensible, inexplicable. A rock against which modern science flings itself, and recoils baffled. It has always been so with Nature, now and again she works some wonder among mammals, some birds, some plants perhaps. It pleases her thus to create a seeming miracle at odd times, and the meaning thereof lies locked in her inscrutable wisdom.

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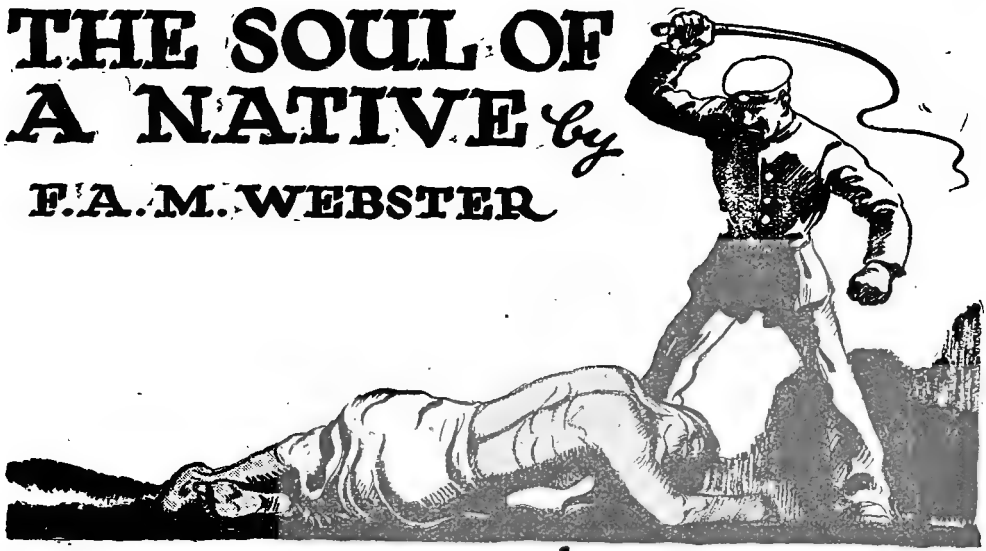
THE SOUL OF A NATIVE

by

F. A. M. WEBSTER



Author of "According to the Law."

THOSE who lived along the German East African border any time prior to August, 1914 had an excellent chance of seeing and hearing things which made them wonder why the world had waxed so angry over the Belgian atrocities in the Congo, and yet raised no protest at the activities of the white officers and N. C. O.s employed in German East Africa.

The post I commanded in 1913 was smack on the edge of the German border. It was marked "dangerous" on the secret maps at headquarters.

In the first place, we had never properly conquered the natives in that district, and they were none too friendly, either to us or the boche, so that we might find ourselves allied with the German troops against the *shenzis*—that is, "wild natives" —any day. But in the backs of our British minds there was always the suspicion that it was against the Germans themselves that we should see service soonest.

Anyway the general situation served to keep me vigilant, and I had a pretty thorough secret service of my own at work before I had been at M'Blano six months. In consequence, there was very little that went on, either side of the border, that did not come to my knowledge sooner or later.

The head of my "secret police" was a Lamu man of very light color, called Kombo bin M'Bwana, and blessed with the keen intellect of his Persian forefathers.

One morning early he entered my *banda* and, standing stiffly to attention, awaited permission to speak.

"*Habari gani?*" said I, giving the conventional Swahili greeting, which also asks for news.

To which he replied, "*Ote mzuri,*" which means that "All is well," and then, as is also the native's custom, he commenced to set out all that was wrong.

"*Effendi,*" he said, "there are a man and woman who dwell in the forest, being of no village and of no tribe known to me, but the man—who, although old and grizzled, is yet tall and strong, since it is said that last moon he slew with his naked hands a leopard which attacked the woman—has a shining ring of black wood, or perhaps gum, worked into his hair. They live in two huts, each shaped like the half of a ball and having a small opening through which one must enter upon all fours.

"The man's name is Umbelazi, and the woman he calls Nava. He, who is sparing of speech, silent even in appearance, and terrible in dispute, as some of the young men of the villages know full well, treats not the woman as is our custom, but as an equal. When they walk abroad she does not follow him, but walks at his side, holding long converse, and when at the huts it is said that he helps even with her duties."

"What say they of them in the villages?" I asked.

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"That they hold themselves outside the laws, but break none," came the reply.

I made further inquiries, but receiving no bad report, left them to their own devices.

One day they vanished.

No one had seen them go. The huts were left untouched, the cooking-pots were in place, the crop of maize they had cultivated grew to ripeness in the garden, but no weapons had been left behind—a significant fact, when considered in conjunction with the presence of the cooking-utensils, without which no native undertakes a long journey. And because they had sojourned in my district and were therefore of my people, I wanted to know more about this strange and sudden exodus.

There was, however, little that I could do beyond sending orders to my intelligence men to be on the lookout for the missing strangers; and anyway the most mysterious happenings are likely to have the most natural explanations—in Africa.

About that time a border commission was due, to investigate certain points in dispute between ourselves and the Germans; and, having received orders to collect information to lay before the commissioners, I assembled a small *safari* and set out.

Some thirty miles away from M'Blano a German post was located at Kisonga, and thither I made my way.

Ten miles short of Kisonga I came to a sudden halt, hearing shouts of laughter ahead, followed by a piercing scream in a woman's voice. The laughter was obviously European, since the white man laughs "Ha! Ha! Ha!" and the native "Ho! Ho! Ho!" Going cautiously forward, I parted the screen of leaves and looked out upon the clearing beyond.

Roped to a tree was an old native of stern countenance and imposing proportions, whose muscles stood out in knotty bunches beneath the glistening black skin as he strained against the constricting ropes. In the center of the clearing a woman, who had been flung face downward, writhed under the hands of four German *askari*—that is, soldiers. A fifth stood over her holding in his hand a heavy *kiboko*, as we call the hippopotamus-hide whip, which in South Africa is known as a *sjambok*. In a camp chair, set well back in the shade, lolled a fat boche, who laughed uproariously at the struggles of his victims.

Shouting an order to the *askari* who

WHAT WAS GERMAN EAST AFRICA, THE SCENE OF THIS STORY, IS NOW KNOWN AS TANGANYIKA TERRITORY

wielded the *kiboko* to stand back, I sprang into the clearing. At the same moment the big boche heaved himself up from his camp chair and ran heavily forward. There was a furious, almost insane, light in his eyes, and his fingers were fumbling at the fastenings of his revolver holster as he advanced. His jaw was thrust forward most invitingly, and I let him have it, too—a nice, clean upper-cut.

Having put the Hun to sleep, I turned my attention to the woman. Her body was pretty badly lacerated and there was a small, hard swelling, of a most peculiar nature, in the left arm-pit; but she was not beyond aid. I had a native medical orderly with me, whom I bade wash and dress her wounds.

While I had been making the examination nad giving my orders Kombo bin M'Bwana had released the big native from his bonds. As I turned he stumbled to his feet, with hand held high above his head, palm outward in salute, and the word he uttered in a deep, resonant voice was, *"Inkoosi"*

Word and gesture were alike familiar, but it was the ring of black gum worked into the hair and highly polished with fat which assembled old memories and told me that he was of the Zulu people.

"You are of the children of Cetewayo?" I asked.

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"You speak truth, *inkoos*," he said. "My daughter and I are both of the Amazulu and have traveled far, to an evil place it seems, where some white men are no better than the *Amaboma* (Boers)."

His words somehow bore the stamp of truth, and yet it seemed well-nigh incredible that these two should have traveled safely more than four thousand miles and through a hundred hostile peoples. Yet there could be no doubt that he was a *keshla*—a ringed man—who in his youth had probably seen service in Cetewayo's *impis*.

I might have questioned him further, but the boche came to his senses and sent a bullet whistling past my ear. In a flash the big Zulu was upon him, pinning him down.

"Stand off!" I shouted. "Do you not know the custom that no black man shall lay a hand upon the white?"

To the boche I said:

"I can not arrest you, for we are upon German territory, where your authority runs; but I shall report this through my Government to yours."

"English swine," he answered. "My Government will know how to deal with your —— people." And at that we left it.

That night I made camp my own side of the border. As I sat at my tent door after supper the old Zulu came to me, and, having been given permission, squatted down upon his heels to tell his story.

"*Baba*," he said, addressing me now as "father," which is a mark of supreme confidence among the Zulu people, "we have wandered far to your land, bearing the secret that is sacred and the treasure that is hidden; for the *Amaboma* heard of the treasure and would have taken it from us. Here we knew that the English, who are just, held sway, wherefore we wished to dwell as dogs in the shadow of your hut."

"Why then did you go away?" I asked.

"*Baba*, we did not go away," he answered. "But coming through the country of the white people called *Germani*, he whom you struck today saw my daughter, Nava, and, desiring her for himself, set his spies to watch us. One day when I was away hunting, his soldiers came secretly to the hut and bore her off. When I returned and found her gone I waited not, but, taking only my battle-ax, followed quickly."

"At Kilonga the battle fury came upon me and I slew men; but others overpowered me—for I grow old—and, having bound me to a tree, would have tortured Nava before my eyes, to punish me and because she would not bow to the white man's will."

"Grow great in my shadow," I answered.

With that he went away. Next day we reached my headquarters at M'Blano.

THE woman, Nava, did not recover so quickly as I had expected. Two mornings later, at about 3 A.M., I heard the sentry challenge, and then Umbelazi's voice outside the *banda*. He seemed to think that his daughter was dying.

She certainly was very bad when I reached the hut, and there was a nasty gray look beneath the black flesh which I did not at all like. It was not her lacerated back alone that was troubling her, but spasmodic pains in the stomach, which doubled her up every other second.

For four-and-twenty hours I never left her, trying hot flannels, brandy, rubbing, and other homely remedies, such as one uses in the wilds. At last I had recourse to chlorodyne, increasing the doses to dangerous proportions as she seemed to grow worse. And all the while old Umbelazi squatted on his heels at the head of the bed, rocking himself to and fro.

Only once did he speak, and that when I touched the slight swelling beneath his daughter's arm, which might, I thought, be the cause of her illness; then he became greatly agitated, begging of me that I would neither touch nor look at the lump.

For some while before the following dawn she lay still, unconvulsed, but apparently *in extremis*. I could do no more. Then, just as the first gray streaks of daylight were stealing in through the thin grass walls, she turned her head, so that her cheek lay against my hand.

"Go to your rest now, *baba*," she said. "The daylight comes again, and with it shall I find new life."

And even as she said, so it was.

Shortly after this a draft of recruits arrived from headquarters, and among them a tremendous young Nubian, named Doka Fademula. He and Umbelazi were both jet black, and, I think, the finest pair of warriors I have ever seen. But I remember the old Zulu, who evinced a great liking for the Nubian, saying to him upon one occasion, when he was helping him to get ready his khaki kit for parade:

"Ah! It is very fine, but you would have

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looked more a man behind a buffalo-hide shield and with the white ox-tails beneath your knees."

Umbelazi was not, however, the only one who conceived a fondness for the big Nubian, upon whom Nava also cast eyes of affection. Nor was he slow in responding.

He constructed a hut, and they set up house together according to tribal custom; but still he remained the lover, treating her always as an equal rather than as a servant.

Their happiness was short-lived, and at the last he reverted to his savage state.

News reached me that the Wanyumwezi had risen and were harrying the river villages. Gathering my forces, I set out to check their depredations, leaving only a small guard to hold the station, and in that guard was Doka, the Nubian. Umbelazi went with me.

There was not a man left alive to tell what had happened when I returned to M'Blano from a fruitless pursuit upon a false report. But the tale was all too plain to read. The guard had died fighting to the last man; the women and children had been carried off. Before his hut Doka Fademula lay dead, his head crushed in and all his wounds in front. He had discarded his khaki kit and rifle in favor of old Umbelazi's war finery and battle-ax, with which he had done terrible execution, making for himself a veritable mat of men to sleep upon. Of Nava there was no sign.

"This is a bad *shauri*," said I, turning to my sergeant-major, Kombo bin M'Bwana. "Whose is the work?"

"It is the work of well-trained soldiers, *effendi*," he answered. "For their dead show how regularly they have advanced against the position held by the guard; and yet among their dead are men of many tribes. This is hard to understand."

I thought things over for a while, but could find no light. Then I asked for Umbelazi, for it seemed strange to me that the father of Nava should be absent at that moment.

"*Effendi*," said Kombo, "the *induna*—" for so we had come to call the old warrior, who in his day had commanded one of Cetewayo's *impis*—"the *induna* sat late by the fire last night with one who cast the bones and foretold strange things. This morning at daylight he had gone."

"Why did you not report this to me?"

"The *induna* was not of the command, *effendi*," answered the *bashouish*. I said no more, for his words were true.

Having set my *askari* to work straightening things up, I went inside the hut Doka had built, and there I found a dead spearman of the attacking forces and two women, dead also. From the wounds upon their bodies and the bloody hatchet, still clasped in the dead hand of one of them, it was evident that they too had put up a grim fight.

And this I must say—it is significant, too—that wherever Nava went men and women were willing to die in her defense, not because of her beauty only, but because of a something which I did not find out until later.

Messages were sent to headquarters, asking that the German officer commanding at Kilonga might be interrogated; my spies went out in every direction, but the only unusual information they brought in tended to indicate that all the known bad characters, and many others who were under suspicion, were leaving the district. We could get no tidings of Nava, nor of Umbelazi, nor any word either of the force that had been abroad the night before I returned to M'Blano.

Every night as I lay awake beneath my mosquito netting, long after the noises of the camp had died down and given place to the night sounds of predatory bush beasts, I had the impression of a person near me, trying to tell me something; but apparently I was unresponsive to the influence.

Then came a night of most awful storm, when the thunder crashed, when the heavens opened and shut and the lightning ran about the sky in streams of lambent fire. But no rain fell from the sullen clouds.

Never before nor since have I witnessed such an absolute paroxysm of nature; the whole world seemed to await the climax. At midnight it came. A few drops of rain fell, hissing upon the hot earth.

Suddenly the heavens split asunder. In the sustained light I saw the figure of a native woman walking toward me from the edge of the bush.

As she halted within a pace of me I saw that the woman was Nava and that her left arm and shoulder were swathed in tightly-bound wrappings.

"GREETINGS, *inkoos*," she said as she raised her right hand.

"Greeting, Nava," I answered. "Whence come you, and why?"

"I come bearing tidings," she answered.

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"Three days after you set out to seek the Wanyumwezi, who, you were told, had risen, the *Germani* lord sent his soldiers, disguised, to take me.

"I was borne away to Kilonga; but no harm befell me, for the people had learned of the treasure I bore hidden and would not let the white lord work his will. But he kept me prisoner, in the hope, I think, that he would be moved to another place, where he would take me among strange people who would know naught of my history, of which he, too, was ignorant, although he knew that I was not as other natives."

She paused for a moment with head inclined as if to catch the words of a voice speaking from the storm to her alone.

"Three days ago," she continued, "word came to me that big war is brewing and that soon the *Germani* soldiers will come to this and other British posts to make an end."

At that I caught her up sharply, asking if she was quite certain of her information.

"Quite, quite certain, *baba*," she answered, then, turning, pointed to the lightning, which flashed and writhed like a hundred fiery serpents. "See," she said, "where the *Inkoos-i-zana-y-Zulu*—the Mother of the Heavens—rides the sky, a harbinger of strife."

"Why do you not ask for your father, Umbelazi?" I said.

"*Baba*," she replied, "we have dwelt in your shadow, as you promised, receiving life and many other favors at your hands. My father even now is about your business, as I too have been."

"What do you mean?" I queried.

"*Baba*," she said again patiently, "you know us only as poor wanderers; you know naught of our greatness, except that Umbelazi was once an *induna* of the Great, Great One, the Black Elephant, whose tread shook all the earth before his might melted and he passed to his rest. But you know not that Umbelazi was chief *induna* and first counselor to the Lion of Zulu, whose name I may not mention, since he is dead."

"And you?" I asked. "Who are you, Nava, and what secret do you hold, what treasure do you carry?"

"I am the descendant of that Great, Great One who is gone; holder of the Hereditary Chieftainship, seed sprung from Senzangecona's loins, Watcher of the Resting-Place of the Kings of Amazulu, Bearer of the Sacred Insignia of the Kings, the great diamond which the *Inkoos-i-zana-y-Zulu* cast down from the heavens when our nation came to birth."

For a while she fell silent, nor could I find any words to say, for I was lost in amazement. After a while she continued, as one who repeats words put into her mouth.

"To save the treasure," she said, "we left Zululand, for the *Amaboma* had found out the whereabouts of the jewel and would have taken it; but Umbelazi buried it in my flesh and we journeyed hither. Yet at the last it has gone from me; but my snake tells me that it will be recovered and returned to safe keeping at the Resting-Place of the Kings."

"How have you lost it?" I asked. "Has the *Germani* taken it from you?"

"The *Germani* has it; but I gave it to him. When I heard that your life was threatened I talked with my snake and made a little bargain, my life for yours—who have been so good to us—if with the sacred jewel I might buy my freedom to come and warn you. After that I cut out the diamond from beneath my armpit, where as I have said, it was buried in the living flesh, thus causing the small swelling, at which Umbelazi said you looked askance when I was ill, and—I am here!"

"It shall be regained," I said.

She gravely bowed her head.

"Tell Umbelazi," she said proudly, "that he shall stand by my throne in the heavens, he who has been as a father to me upon earth, although not of the blood royal."

Suddenly she turned her back upon me, throwing up her arms and gazing upward.

"The hour of payment has come!" she cried. "See where the *Inkoos-i-zana-y-Zulu* rides down the heavens to give me welcome!"

There was a blinding flash of lightning, which sent me staggering back with my arm flung up to protect my eyes—a shattering, rending crash of thunder, and then abysmal silence.

The storm was completely ended.

When a lantern was brought its light revealed the charred corpse of Nava.

At dawn a brother officer arrived with orders that I should hand over the command to him and report at headquarters.

Two hours later I was on my way down-country.

After four hours' marching I reached the

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first river, only to find it in flood and the ford impassable. Soon I caught the faint echo of a mutter of firing far away. Shortly after, a runner came panting to the river bank, and wrung his hands to find the water a roaring torrent which barred his way. Turning, he saw me and sprang to the salute.

"*Effendi*," said he, "I go to headquarters for help. The *Germani askari* attack us in great numbers, and not long may the post be held without reenforcements."

There was nothing I could do to help him; and yet I had almost made up my mind to turn back and lend a hand, when suddenly I caught the sound of many feet running. I drew my revolver and waited.

Presently there emerged into the open from a forest path fully four hundred warriors, armed variously, and with that grand old warrior Umbelazi at their head, clad in all the splendid panoply of war, proper to the dignity of a Zulu *induna*. Swiftly the warriors wheeled, forming into four ranks, with Umbelazi in the forefront of the center. For a moment they stood like black graven images. Then up shot his right hand, grasping a battle-ax, and up shot the right hands of all his followers as the royal salute, "*Bayete*," boomed out on a deep resonant note.

"What is the meaning of this, Umbelazi?" I asked.

"*Inkoos*," he answered, "more than a moon ago I had word that ere long the hyenas would feed full; then went I away and gathered these nameless ones, who would retrieve their honor, if that be your will."

"What would you do?" I asked.

"We would fight for that Great, Great White One who sits across the Black Water," came the instant response.

"So be it," I said. "We will go back to M'Blano."

THEN followed a race against time to save the British frontier.

At first we moved along at a steady trot and in silence, while I watched Umbelazi out of the tail of my eye to see how he would stand the strain. But after a mile had been traversed the pace increased, for the rhythm of the run seemed to have stolen into the men's blood, awakening all their latent savagery. They began to sing a wonderful song.

One man would shout a phrase in high-pitched, long-drawn notes, then the whole lot roared back the response in deep, booming tones. My ——, it was amazing! One felt the power of it firing one's own blood. All thought of the stress of sustained effort was forgotten. The rhythm changed, and now every one was singing. Here and there a man lifted up his hands and shook his weapons and shield. Here and there a man leaped high into the air as he shouted fiercely, and between whiles they stamped all together as they ran.

There was a peculiar dead, stale smell in the air, and yet somehow I did not mind it, for the wonder of watching the supple muscles rippling beneath black skins glistening with sweat had gripped my imagination; but most of all I was amazed at the endurance of the old *induna*. By the time we came to the gorge, where we had to climb slowly and carefully down broken rocks, the blood was drumming in my ears, and my breath was coming in great sobbing gasps, so that I was grateful for the break in the rhythm of movement. And now we caught the sound of firing, nearer and more distinct.

Up the other side of the gorge we climbed, and soon were running hard again, still singing.

M'Blano was very near now. Only another quarter of a mile, I told myself, and we should see the fight raging below. Only another two hundred yards, but my eyes were almost blind, and I think I'd have given my soul to stop and lie down; but I felt that the natives were watching me keenly. I managed to shout a coarse joke in Swahili and got a roar of laughter in response.

Some one thrust the rhinoceros-horn haft of an ax into my hand; and at the feel of it every symptom of exhaustion vanished, for I was seeing red for the first time in my life.

Through the shattered ranks of our comrades we raged, still singing, and then—then we were into the boche, and the singing ceased.

On every hand I heard the labored grunt of men who fought fiercely and in silence; the long-drawn, choking groans of the dying, and, ever at my side, the savage "S'gee! S'gee!" with which old Umbelazi despatched his enemies.

Suddenly I found myself face to face with the German officer who had commanded at Kilonga. At the sight of me he threw up his hands, but I was a savage

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then. I sent in a crashing blow and saw the half-moon blade of the ax bite deep into his neck, at the junction of the body.

Then the madness left me. But I remembered all that Nava had said. I searched the dead Hun's pockets and found the most amazing diamond concealed in one of them. This I took, and, finding the battle over, went in search of Umbelazi. I feared that I should not find him, for one does not expect even a seasoned Zulu warrior of more than sixty Summers to run such a race as we had run and to come unscathed at the end of it through such a fight as we had fought.

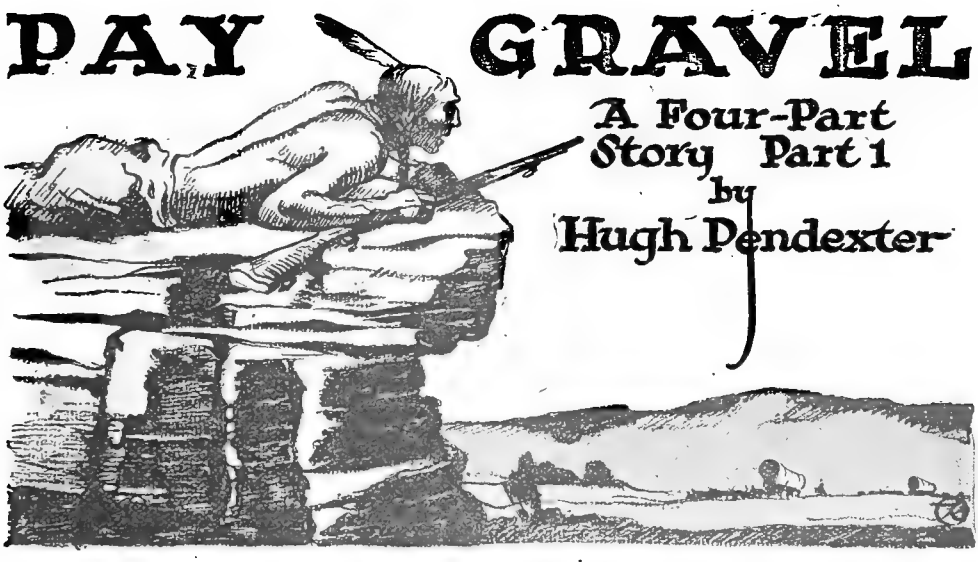
At length I saw him. He was standing in the midst of a ring of dead men, leaning wearily upon the haft of his bloody battle-ax. He raised the weapon above his head in salute as he caught sight of me.

"*Wa, inkoos!*" he exclaimed with a grim, delighted chuckle. "That was a fight worth living for!"

Then he caught sight of the great diamond where it sparkled upon the palm of my extended hand. A low exclamation burst from his lips, and every sign of tiredness seemed to leave him as his eyes fastened themselves upon the jewel. He fell upon his knees, bowing his grizzled head in the dust; and many others among the natives did likewise.

"*Inkoos,*" he said as he took the stone from my hand, "give me permission to depart tomorrow, for now I know that my days are numbered; and I would journey far, to lay the Star of the Heavens in safe keeping at the Resting-Place of Kings, before I go to render an account of my stewardship to that Great, Great One, whose tread once shook the earth, and at whose word whole nations fell flat."

"*Hamba gahle!* Go in peace!" I answered in the Zulu tongue; and at my word his right hand shot up in salute as the royal "*Bayete*" rolled from his lips.



Author of "The White Dawn," "Lost Diggings," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE TRAIL TO GOLDLAND

ALL DAY the three horsemen had traveled under a cold gray sky to swing farther away from the Raw Hide Buttes and cross the Running Water. The occasional showers of rain completed their dejection.

Two days before, when leaving Fort Laramie, they had been thrilled by stories of Cheyenne City being crowded with wagon-trains, and wild with excitement over the news from the Black Hills. They had considered it a triumph to be in advance of the small army of pedestrians, mounted men and wagons in this race to the hills.

But now they were remembering that

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ever since the last snows of April the road had been thronged by fortune-hunters and those who preyed upon them. It had seemed a fine thing to set out alone while others tarried for an escort of troops, or until their numbers could defy Indian attacks. They had deemed it to be a simple maneuver, this slipping through hostile country while Cheyenne and Sioux were looking for bigger game.

Every hour the grades grew steeper and the country more unlovely. Added to physical discomfort was the knowledge that the worst was ahead. For in 1876—and this was the first day of August in that lively year—although the country south of the North Platte was held by troops and was quite thoroughly mapped, all north of the river was so much uncertainty. Even the maps furnished the military in many instances were unreliable.

To Peter Dinsdale, leading spirit of the three adventurers, it was new country, as he claimed to be fresh from Arizona. His companions were direct from the East, and their ignorance was complete. Late afternoon found them still plodding through alkali country, dismal with sagebrush and cactus.

One incident broke the monotony of the afternoon's journey—the meeting with a large freight-wagon drawn by six horses. On one side of the wagon was painted:

"San Juan Joe's Outfit. Deadwood City, Deadwood Gulch."

Inside, sheltered from the gusty rain, were five men, each heavily armed. Dinsdale at a glance identified four of these as being gentlemen of the night—gamblers. The other, the driver, was uncouth and true to the type of the time and place. Dinsdale's companions saw only fortunate human beings protected from the cold storm and bound "out." For a bit they were touched with homesickness and forgot their dreams of gold.

Only the driver was garrulous, perhaps because he was excluded from the confidences of his passengers. He announced he was driving to Cheyenne City to bring back a freight of implements and supplies for the "swellest gamblin' place" in the hills.

What interested the horsemen more, especially the Easterners, was the information that two wagons, with seven or eight men, were ahead on Hat Creek, waiting for reenforcements before risking the trip across the strip of Indian country. Eager to add their rifles to the train, the three men impatiently urged their weary animals up the shoulder of a lofty bluff, the summit of which was crowned by a chimney of rock.

Dinsdale was the first to reach a point affording a view of the valley. He raised a cheer on beholding the ribbon of green marking the course of the timbered stream. It was the most heartening spectacle the travelers had seen in the gray, desolate country.

Then the clouds split to allow a farewell bit of encouragement from the sun. With their dome-like heights shrouded in mist there stood revealed the dark, pine-crowned mass of the Black Hills, rightly named and isolated in the midst of the prairie. Dinsdale soberly informed his companions:

"Train's pulled out. We'll be hard put to overhaul it."

The other two men forgot the sunshine and stared moodily down on Hat Creek, the dividing-line between "safe" and "hostile" country. In an attempt to revive their drooping spirits Dinsdale advised that they push forward to the Cheyenne River. This was strenuously objected to, and he was reminded that Johnny Bowman's ranch was across the creek. The hospitality of the ranch was famous from the Upper Missouri to Cheyenne City and Denver. To the Easterners it was much more alluring as a stopping-place than an improvised camp in the Indian country. One spoke feelingly of the soldiers supposed to be camping close by the ranch.

"Bowman's it is then," agreed Dinsdale, but without enthusiasm.

"If we came up here to find a ranch the program is bully. But if we're keen to get into the hills we ought to take advantage of this weather and push on."

It was evening before they reached the creek, and their confidence in the military weakened when they found that only six soldiers were in the camp, the others, some twoscore, being absent on a scout.

"And to think the worst and the most dangerous part of the trip is still between us and the hills!" lamented one of the men.

"We came a-purpose to go through with it," Dinsdale reminded him.

The horses knew the day's hard grind was over and whinnied their pleasure as a ranch-hand appeared out of the dusk to lead them to the corral. The travelers lost no

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time in entering the popular way-station. The ranch-room was large; it served as inn, store, and barroom. One could buy anything at Bowman's which pertained to travel or hills outfit, from a six-horse team down to a glass of whisky.

This night there were only four guests in the house, if three old frontiersmen in tattered buckskin, and grouped before the open fire could be styled such. To the casual eye they were loungers rather than transients. From their talk it was evident that they were elated by each fresh bit of Indian news, and were hoping for much trouble. They eagerly questioned the newcomers, but quickly lost their interest on learning that they were from the south and had yet to be introduced to the perils of hostile country. The fourth man, tall and slender and of dark complexion, was dining sumptuously at the long table on venison, warm bread and coffee.

The Easterners, somewhat wild of eye, lingered near the plainsmen, hungry for authentic information. The three old men, appreciating the gullibility of their audience, lost no time in turning their imagination loose in a patched-up recital of horrors.

Very soon the story-tellers had their listeners reduced to dismay.

Dinsdale ignored their garrulous tales and gravitated to the table. He observed and admired the rather immaculate dress of the dark-faced man. The high, patent-leather boots had lost none of their polish because of the storm. The black sack coat was faultless in fit, and the flannel shirt—the only concession to the requirements of the rough road—was relieved by a flowing red tie.

"Gambling man and dandy," decided Dinsdale as he made to seat himself at the end of the table.

The man glanced up, smiled pleasantly and motioned for him to be more neighborly by kicking back the chair opposite his. Dinsdale was glad to accept the invitation.

"I'm Pete Dinsdale, from Cheyenne City; from Arizona before that," he informed the other as he shifted his place.

"I'm called 'San Juan' Joe. I have a place up in the hills. The coffee here is good, and I can't say too much for the venison."

"Met your team going out. Saw your name on it."

"I came down this far with it. Found my outfit back yonder's too small to accommodate the rush, and it's no slouch of an outfit as it stands. Must have another roulette wheel and more fixings, though. You're going through?"

"Starting early in the morning."

"Didn't fancy the stage?"

"I like a horse. Better chance to fight or run."

"What say to our riding together? I'm not keen to quit my blankets to see the sun rise, but I can if I must. Don't reckon your friends will object to my joining your party."

"They'll be tickled to death. Things don't look so rosy to them as they did back East, when they were swallowing fool yarns about two men shipping out nineteen hundred pounds of gold from Cheyenne City. What won't a tenderfoot swallow?

"They showed me the newspaper piece. 'Seven months' work pans out three hundred thousand dollars,' it ran. Either the writing cuss made a mistake in the number of pounds, or didn't know what gold's worth."

"Only a hundred-odd thousand dollars short in his estimate. As near as they usually get it," chuckled the gambler.

Dinsdale ate hungrily for some minutes, then remarked—

"You'd planned to go through with the outfit, or just serving as guard this far?"

"I'd hoped to meet a certain man here. Cheyenne sport. Fool business. He hasn't shown up, and I'm going right back and let him hunt me up."

Further study of San Juan Joe convinced Dinsdale that there was Indian blood in him, although there was nothing to suggest this in his personal presentment and speech. After satisfying his hunger Dinsdale lighted his pipe and said:

"I was keen to push through in the darkness to the Cheyenne River. My mates didn't take to the idea. But now that we're four——"

"The ——! Go out in this weather? When we have this fire and food and really good whisky?" cried the gambler in mock dismay. "I'll get up before sunrise, but that's my limit."

"I'm not much disappointed," smiled Dinsdale. "I'm afraid my friends have listened too long to step outside this place till daylight."

"If it's in the cards that we get through

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we'll turn the trick. If the cards are against us no amount of night travel will help." And San Juan shrugged his shoulders and smiled, as if making game of his superstition even while catering to it.

Dinsdale turned and looked at his companions. They were being served by the fire and were pausing between mouthfuls to gape in horror at the solemn recital of the three old liars.

"—an' cut off his arms while he was alive," soberly concluded one of the narrators.

"An' his ears," eagerly added another. "Don't go forgittin' his ears, Ben."

"Gawdfry!" hoarsely exclaimed the younger of the Easterners.

"They'll be finished by morning," sighed Dinsdale. "I've heard great yarns about Deadwood Gulch."

"They overplay it," said San Juan, leaning back and carefully lighting an excellent cigar. "The gulch is certainly the poor man's diggings. But it's nothing like Confederate Gulch in Montana. One thousand dollars to a pan I saw taken out up there. ——, what luck!

"Yet Deadwood Gulch is the place for the man with only a frying-pan, a few pounds of bacon, pick and shovel. But when one remembers Montana and the nuggets of Tuolumne County, California, it doesn't seem so much a much. Perhaps the hills will remain the poor man's diggings all the longer just because they can't pan out a fortune in a few days. Eastern and Coast capital may be slower to come in and gobble up things.

"One thing that's made us all crazy is the fact that we've been figuring the days of placer mining, with each man grabbing for himself, were over. Then came the discovery in the hills and opened the game for the poor man once more. The hills are all right, you understand. The bar and hill diggings are good, and they'll take out two million this season. Next Summer will see mills at work, for they're after quartz now. But once vein-mining comes in, then good-by to the placers and the poor man's chance."

"Down at Laramie they're saying the Injuns are bothering you quite a bit."

"The red devils have marked nearly four hundred killings on their coup-sticks since the season opened. I'm not including the butcheries outside the hills. Yes, the Injuns are holding back discoveries all right. Prospectors don't dare go far from any camp."

"Road-agents have been pretty busy, too, I take it."

"Busy, but not making much. No big hauls. They did get twenty-five thousand dollars from one treasure-coach, but only two men were guarding it. The regular coach carries two hundred thousand each trip, with twelve guards. The agents haven't tried to crack one of those yet.

"Shippers of gold are paying one and a half per cent., or fifteen dollars a thousand. Stage company takes one per cent., the railroad the rest.

"The passenger-coaches don't pan out very high, but nearly every one is held up. The total may make good picking if there aren't too many to share in it. Worst of it is they take the mails. They operate on this crick, on the Cheyenne and in the foot-hills."

"Wonder the Injuns don't bag some of the agents."

"Maybe they do. Hope so. Every time a passenger is robbed I feel I've lost that much."

And San Juan Joe laughed softly.

Dinsdale succeeded in tearing his friends away from their fascinating company and brought them to the table to meet San Juan Joe. Warm with food and several drinks, one of them proposed a game. Joe shook his head and with a wink at Dinsdale gravely explained:

"I seldom touch a card for money. Always afraid I'll meet up with some slick fellows and get cleaned out."

After a little talk Dinsdale and his companions turned in, but San Juan Joe, a slave to nocturnal habits, sat up far into the night playing solitaire.

THE morning was cold and damp, with gray clouds threatening more rain. The Easterners were standing before the fireplace when Dinsdale joined them. They ceased talking as he came up and became strangely silent. He urged them to hurry their breakfast and make ready for an early start. The older of the two shamefacedly confessed:

"Pete, we've had enough. From what those men at the fire said last night—and they're old enough to know what they're talking about—we'd be derned lucky to git through alive. If we made the hills what

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would we find? Hills filled with men who haven't the price of a dinner, and who don't dare hunt for gold because of the Indians. But even if we got there and did find gold what chance would we stand of fetching it out? Either the road-agents or the Indians would be sure to catch us."

"Those old fools were trying to scare you," warmly remonstrated Dinsdale.

"They scared this boy all right," frankly confessed the younger of the men. "I'm through. I wouldn't go a rod farther for a whole mountain of gold. Even whisky can't give me enough sand. I'm a low-down coward and glad of it; for I believe I'll save my neck by turning back."

"We'd rather you'd think us —— fools, Pete, than to take the risk," added the other. "This creek marks the beginning of the dangerous country. So we're going to wait for the first outfit bound south and strike for Fort Laramie."

"Those old liars certainly filled you boys up," sighed Dinsdale. "Well, if you really feel that way about it then the hills aren't any place for you. Go back and stick to raising vegetables and flowers. And I wish you luck. I'm starting as soon as I eat."

He had finished his breakfast when San Juan Joe turned out. Leaving the gambler to bolt his venison, he found Bowman in the kitchen and paid his score. The ranch-keeper was genial and well liked by all who ever partook of his excellent fare. Nor was he surprized to learn that two of the guests had had enough of gold-hunting. Dinsdale added:

"But San Juan Joe and I are riding on together. He looks a bit Indianish to me."

"He's got a bit of red blood in him," Bowman said. "Some say 'Pache. Some say Comanche. He comes from down that way originally. His father was an army contractor. His mother was Spanish, with a streak of Injun.

"As a boy Joe was taken East by his father and eddicated top-high. The old man reckoned he'd turned him out a white man and a scholar. But Joe couldn't keep away from the border. Too much of a dandy to work, so he takes it soft and easy running his games. Square games, too; and that's a heap more'n I can say of some other gambling outfits in the hills.

"If any one can get across the Injun stretch it's Joe. He's all —— in a fight, and yet he don't seem to have many fights."

While Dinsdale went to look after his horse the gambler in turn interviewed Bowman. He casually inquired:

"Know anything about Dinsdale? We're riding through together."

"Seems a likely young man. Packs two guns and paid me in greenbacks. He won't scare easy."

"Glad to hear you say it. I'd sized him up the same way. I reckon we'll have a bit of trouble getting in. Rather be alone than to have a half-man with me. Yes, I figgered him a bad one to try a bluff on."

"What makes you 'low you'll have any trouble? Road-agents or Injuns?"

"Injuns. Cards ran queer for me last night. There was trouble in his pile and in mine. Yet we came together on top of the last pile. I don't count agents as a danger—just a bother."

Despite their early rising the two did not get started until nine o'clock because of the threat of rain. Already the mud was deep, and did it rain it would be better to wait another day. Even the gambler admitted the wisdom of this, though he was keen to return to his business. Not until the sun struggled through the sullen clouds was the journey commenced. Bowman shouted good wishes after them, and the two Easterners waved their hats in farewell.

The traveling was hard on the horses, as the mud had a glue-like tenacity in clinging to the hoofs. After two hours of slow progress they swung in close to a high yellow bluff and came to Indian Creek.

San Juan Joe warned Dinsdale that this was one of the danger spots of the trip. They halted and looked about for signs of the two wagons. They found the trail left by the mud-blocked wheels, and could tell where at frequent intervals the men had halted to shovel the mud from between the spokes and from between the wheels and the wagon-boxes.

The bed of the creek was two hundred yards wide, with the high, steep banks heavily timbered. The stream, scarcely more than a rivulet, meandered from bank to bank. The road descended into the bed and followed it up for three miles, and in doing this passed close to several sharply outlined mounds, each of which could furnish an excellent ambuscade.

The two men rode several rods apart, the gambler in the lead. Each was armed with a Winchester forty-four; but for immediate

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use Dinsdale preferred his two hand-guns, Colt forty-fours, as he believed any fight that might be brought to them would be in the nature of a hand-to-hand struggle. They were not attacked, and soon quit the bed of the creek to follow its general course for fifteen miles.

The road steadily led to higher ground. Fortunately there was no rain; but the sun retreated to cover, and the wind was bleak and chilling. They were still in the alkali country, and the ground was white in places as if patched with snow. By six o'clock they had covered some eighteen miles, and were glad to take refuge in a deserted cabin at the right of the road and on the bank of the creek, which by this time was a torrent.

San Juan Joe was an excellent companion, as he accepted all vicissitudes as something prearranged and therefore not to be avoided. Dinsdale found a rusty pail and brought water from the creek. He was disgusted to find the water to be of an almost molasses consistency and so white with alkali as to look like milk. San Juan laughed and philosophically pounded half a dozen prickly pears to a pulp and put them in the water to "settle" it for the morrow's breakfast.

They ate cold venison and did not attempt coffee. Dinsdale retired early, leaving San Juan seated before a sickly fire, dealing out the cards.

By morning the persistent wind had dried up much of the mud, and, cheered by the prospect of making good time, the men devoured some raw ham and hardtack, brought along by the gambler, and resumed their journey. As they followed the road, riding side by side, Dinsdale remarked on his companion's lack of belt-guns.

"Got in the habit of carrying these," San Juan explained as he produced two double-barrel Remington derringers, forty-one caliber. "Guns like yours would be a nuisance in my business. I'm sure of four shots, and as I shoot pretty straight and as the fighting would be at close quarters four bullets are as good as a dozen."

The country grew wilder and more broken at every rod, the road continually leading across huge land-waves, with the slopes ever lengthening, until at times they crawled upward, or briskly descended, for two miles at a stretch. Talk between them ceased as they raised the ominous shoulders of Buffalo Gap Bluffs off to their right. Their gaze continually sought this dark silhouette and the mile-wide opening through which ran the Indian trail to the Red Cloud Agency beyond.

They ascended a high ridge that crossed their course at right angles and came to the trail which connected the agencies with the stronghold of the Northern Sioux. It was rather insignificant to look at, being not more than a foot wide; but over it daily passed a score or more of warriors, armed with the latest in guns and ammunition, with unused Government blankets on their ponies, bound for the Tongue, the Big Horn, the Rosebud or the Yellowstone. They went to join Crazy Horse's and Sitting Bull's hostiles, and they chose the war-path with much equanimity because their squaws and children and old men were safe and snug at the agencies and living on Government rations.

THE Summer campaign of 1876 had brought no defeats to the Sioux and Cheyennes. The latter, whose corn-fields once grew along the Bellefourche, claimed a victory over General Crook as the result of the June fight on the Rosebud. Custer's death a week later marked the peak of Sioux supremacy.

Earlier in the year, on St. Patrick's Day, the power of the hostiles might have been seriously impaired had not General J. J. Reynolds retreated from Crazy Horse's village in the valley of the Powder, thus throwing away what might have been a striking victory. So long as Crazy Horse, Ogalala chief and leader of the southern Sioux, and Sitting Bull, tribal leader of the Hunkpapa Teton, refused to live on reservations there could be no peace for the country above the North Platte, no safety for the men, women and children cooped up in the Black Hills.

It was the old story of treaty stipulations being recognized by the whites until something was found on the Indian's land which the white man wanted. Curiously enough it was the Federal Government that started the gold-rush to the debatable hills by sending an expedition to confirm the many border stories about gold to be found there. Once the cry was raised in Seventy-four "Custer's soldiers have found gold in the Black Hills! Hills of gold! Gold from the grass-roots down!" the red man got together his best guns, accumulated much fixed ammunition, saw that his war-ponies were

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fit, made new medicine, smoked war tobacco, and with the Spring grass carried the pipe against the frontier.

All too well did the Indians understand what was about to happen to their homeland now that the precious metal had been found upon it. The lesson had been taught in California, Colorado, Idaho and Montana.

As a result of the Government's curiosity the new Department of the Platte, reaching from the Missouri to the western shore of Great Salt Lake, found itself facing all sorts of disagreeable possibilities. After the first exploitation of the Custer expedition into the hills the department feared trouble with the Bannocks and Shoshoni in Idaho and Wyoming, with the Utes in Utah and western Wyoming, with the Otoes, Poncas, Omahas, Winnebagoes and Pawnees in Nebraska, and with the Arapahoes, Sioux and Cheyenne in Dakota and Nebraska.

Happily the situation was quick to clear, with the exception of the Cheyenne and Sioux. The other Nebraska tribes, for years well disposed toward the whites, would at the worst spur the hostiles to greater atrocities in Nebraska by stealing their ponies.

The Pawnees were eager to send men to fight the Sioux, and the mountain tribes sent aid to the military. Without these native scouts the campaign would have stretched out interminably.

If the agents at Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies had not influenced the reservation Indians to refuse aid for Crook the campaign of Seventy-six might have been ended by Mid-Summer. But all the "ifs" could not alter the fact that the hostiles were ready for another battle, had as yet suffered no reverses sufficient to dash their optimism, and were still firm in their belief that the vision seen by Sitting Bull, when he participated in a medicine lodge held on Tongue River the preceding year, would all come true.

Having satisfied its curiosity as to the presence of gold in the hills, the Government promptly forbade the gold-hungry to profit by the enticing disclosures. Many prospectors had interpreted the Government's activity in Seventy-four as an invitation for them to rush to the hills. But soldiers were sent to overhaul the trains, burn the wagons and imprison the fortune-seekers.

The Indians, primed from the start to resent the inevitable stampede, did not need this example; but, having beheld it, they pronounced it good and proceeded to burn a score of trains where the Government had destroyed one wagon, to kill a hundred whites where the Great Father in Washington had imprisoned one. Thus while San Juan Joe and Dinsdale were warily making down the highest ridge in the chain to strike the Cheyenne River the hill towns were praying for Crook to march down from the Little Missouri country into Deadwood Gulch.

The river was reached at dusk, and men and horses enjoyed the first drink of water since morning. Had they arrived twenty

hours earlier they would have found the bed of the stream almost dry and might have been compelled to dig a hole before they could procure water. Now the river was fifty yards wide and from four to nine feet deep.

On the opposite side was a small ranch. People emerged from this and shouted for them not to risk a crossing until morning because of the quicksands.

"You'd think by the way they hoot that this was Amphibious Creek with its double bottom," said the gambler. "Follow me."

He rode along the bank for a few rods, found where the wagons forded, and sent his horse into the flood. They made the crossing without much trouble and were soon drying their clothes in the ranch-house.

"What's ahead of us now?" asked Dinsdale as they finished steaming their garments and sat down to an appetizing supper of fried venison, hot bread and coffee.

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"The worst of the lot," San Juan cheerfully answered. "But it's a short dash. Sudden death rather than a long, lingering illness. If it's in the cards that we make it there's no reason in worrying. If the cards run against us, worrying won't help any."

He added to this bit of philosophy—

"Of course we mustn't be taken alive."

"I reckon we won't," said Dinsdale.

After supper they inquired of a white-haired man in plains dress about the two wagons they had been expecting to come up with.

"They 'lowed to wait at the soldiers' camp near the mouth of Red Cañon," mumbled the ancient. "If the boss of that outfit—called hisself Belman an' has his woman along—has got any brains he'll wait till a big train comes along."

For Dinsdale's enlightenment the gambler informed him:

"Red Cañon is called 'The Gate of Hell.' Regular death-trap if the Injuns jump us. No chance to hide up. Walls high and steep. No place to run once they've cut you off in both directions. Seven outfits slaughtered in there since May.

"The time to go through is at night. Injuns don't take kindly to night-work. My idea is to stay here till tomorrow afternoon, then make a dash for it. I've been through the cañon four times this season, this making the fifth. But somehow I never can get to fancy it."

"Think it's better at night, eh?"

"Only one other time better—when there's a thunder-storm on. That's bad medicine for the most ambitious buck. We'll have a moon for the first part of the trip. Not that I'm partial to moons; but if we're jumped it'll be near the upper end, and the moon will be abed by that time. Injuns don't like to try for a killing near the lower end for fear of the soldiers. Then again they'll crawl right up to the soldiers' camp.

"Once we're through we'll be only twenty-five miles from Custer City. I don't mind the —— much if they don't get me cornered."

Before taking to his blankets Dinsdale passed the time by talking with the old man, whose life had been spent on the plains and in the hills. His sympathies seemed to be with the Indians; and of all the red men he admired the Cheyennes the most. He was at the fight on the Rosebud, one of Tom Moore's sharpshooters, and he declared the Indians were victorious.

He knew many of the warriors, both Cheyenne and Sioux, and spoke of them in the highest terms. Crazy Horse was the fighter and strategist. He was less enthusiastic about Sitting Bull, yet declared that the victory over the Seventh Cavalry on the Little Big Horn had been foretold by Sitting Bull, and he "reckoned" that the massacre directly resulted from the new war medicine Sitting Bull was making in the hills when the fight began.

But the bulk of his praise was for the Cheyennes. He narrated with much gusto various coups counted by their leaders in the Rosebud affair. From his position among the rocks he had enjoyed a good view of the battlefield. But his recollections seemed to consist largely of what the enemy dared and achieved. He described how one Cheyenne warrior so distinguished himself as to win the privilege to select the center pole whenever a new medicine lodge was to be erected; how White Elk was given the medicine of the swallow by his uncle; how Spotted Wolf, a battle-scarred veteran, sent his son, White Shield, into the fray safeguarded by the kingfisher medicine.

The old man's thoughts were entirely with the past. He sorrowed at believing that this would be the last campaign in which bows and arrows, lances and shields, would be used, as well as rifles. The passing of the aboriginal weapons marked for him the going out of the old order.

He viewed the coming of the whites as an intrusion of an alien race. He was reluctant to admit that the Indian agents were in part responsible for the Custer massacre, owing to their grossly underestimating the number of hostiles to be found in the Big Horn country. That they reported twice as many Indians to be drawing Government rations at Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies as were in fact then living there, did not impress the old man as contributing decisively to a red victory. He would give most credit to the Cheyennes.

He explained that they were irresistible fighters because of their sacred arrows and the sacred medicine hat. So long as these powerful medicines were not displeased with their red children he could not see how any number of cavalry or walking-soldiers could subdue the country north of the Platte. He told of one agent who worked

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for twelve hundred dollars a year and after three years retired with three hundred thousand dollars "saved up."

"I always reckoned that cuss had to scrimp like the —— to do it," he added.

San Juan Joe said that for fifteen years the agency Indians had not received more than one-fifth of all the moneys appropriated for them. He continued:

"There were twice as many Injuns on the Little Big Horn as the Indian inspectors reported to be hostile. They represented they were feeding more than forty-two thousand reds at the Government's expense, when as a truth none but the old, the very young and the women were at the agencies. They had plenty of guns, and some carried long-range sporting rifles that cost more than a hundred dollars."

"Th' whites ain't got no war medicine," peevishly insisted the old man. "How'n —— can they figger on winnin'?"

"It's all in the cards, gran'pa," soothed San Juan. "And I'll admit the deck has been stacked against the Injuns many times. Still they've kept the game even, or better, so far as killings go.

"General Crook says Crazy Horse is the greatest Injun on the plains. But his uncle, Spotted Tail, cuts the ace, I'm saying. He has brains enough to see the reds can't win, and he wants to get the most he can for them before they're eternally whipped."

"Brains?" scoffed the old man. "Crazy Hoss's worth a dozen of his uncle. An' Red Cloud tops the two of 'em. He's counted eighty coups already. Didn't he make the Government quit the three forts on the old Montana road in Sixty-eight? Didn't he do for Fetterman and his men at Fort Kearny? Didn't he hold the Montana road so's not a wagon passed over it for nigh on to a year?

"Waugh! Don't talk to me about them agency warriors! Red Cloud's th' greatest chief th' Sioux ever had. If he was carryin' th' pipe this Summer there wouldn't be nary a wagon makin' th' Black Hills.

"But as a fighter there ain't no Sioux as is more heartsome than Little Hawk of the Cheyennes. If ever a fighter oughter be given a seat on th' west side of the circle it's him. He's jest such a fightin' man as was old Gentle Hoss, his father afore him."

"Gran'pa, you're more red than white," laughed San Juan. "The Cheyenne and Sioux are dead game, but they'll never stand punishment like the Apaches do. They're too prosperous. Their lodges hold too much of the white man's truck.

"If an Apache loses a fight, but saves his life, he's just as well off as he was before beginning to fight. But when a northern hostile runs against a full house he loses real property. He knows he's broke. He's been playing poker for real money instead of just for chips. He mulls over his losses. He wants to save what he has left. It takes the fighting heart out of him."

Dinsdale yawned and vowed—

"Injuns or no Injuns, I'm going through tomorrow, and I'm going to bed now."

"I'll sit up with gran'pa," said Joe, "and play a little solitaire."

The last Dinsdale remembered was the gambler deftly dealing and shuffling the cards, while the old man leaned toward the fire and stared at the flame-pictures.

CHAPTER II

"THE GATE OF HELL"

OVER night the wind shifted from the east, whence comes the rain to the hills country, and was blowing smartly from the south when the two travelers sat down to breakfast. There was no occasion for haste, however, as San Juan Joe insisted that they would gain nothing by making the mouth of Red Cañon before twilight. So they loitered about the ranch and looked after their horses and gossiped with the old plainsman.

When they swung into the saddle late in the afternoon the old man combed his white beard with his gnarled fingers and called after them:

"Ye won't git through. Ye're derned fools to try it. Wait for a big train."

"It's a death-trap or an open road," San Juan told Dinsdale as they galloped along.

"The soldiers at the mouth of the cañon?"

"Too few to escort trains through. Can't watch both ends. If the Government would place a military post in the hills the Injuns would keep out. Foot-soldiers are guarding the road between Laramie and Custer City. Then there are two companies of cavalry trying to cover the country between Buffalo Gap and the North Platte.

"Short time ago Teddy Egan, of the Second Cavalry, rescued a train near the Cheyenne. Six hundred warriors were attacking it. Nip and tuck. Egan's a rare

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fighter. Led the charge on Crazy Horse's village last March.

"But what can two companies do with the hostiles numbering thousands and thousands? There were enough bucks on the path to stand Crook off, to wipe out Custer, raid the Loup Valley in Nebraska, keep things moving along the Chug in Wyoming, and have enough men left over to give every train for the hills a fight. Then there's always small parties sneaking into the hills to wipe out any miner who wanders off by himself to hunt for color.

"But if it's in the cards for us to get through we'll go through. The cards have been right every trip I've made this season. They had to be before I'd start out."

"What did the cards say last night?" curiously asked Dinsdale.

"Showed trouble in the cañon. Seemed to be sort of blind. But you and I showed up all right at the end. We'll know just what it means when we get to it. I'll try them again when we reach the soldiers' camp."

Dinsdale told himself it was all nonsense, and yet he would have felt easier if the cards had indicated a passage, minus any danger.

"You depend on what the cards tell you?" he asked.

San Juan Joe stared at him in wide-eyed surprize and answered:

"Why, of course. I play it with a copper every time."

"Every man to his own medicine. When the sun shines warm and my tummy is full I feel like an eagle."

They jogged along slowly, watching either side of the trail and saving their horses for an emergency. The masses of dark-green pines covering the domes of the hills gave a repelling atmosphere to the country.

The hills had ever been a great mystery, therefore a big medicine, to the Sioux. They were the earthly abode of Wankantanka when this all-powerful mystery became wearied of the eternal strife between the monster Thunder-Birds and Unktehi, the spirit rattlesnake, and dropped down from the clouds. The hills formed a private preserve for Wankantanka, to which his red children were free to come under certain conditions. The innumerable ravines and park-like levels afforded refuge in times of danger and famous hunting-grounds in times of famine. Squaws went there to cut new lodge-poles.

The trails between the North Platte and the tributaries of the Yellowstone threaded through many of the valleys, but no permanent villages were pitched there. A fixed abode would be an intrusion on the privacy of the god. When displeased because of undue familiarity, the guardian deity spoke with the voice of thunder and with a tongue of lightning.

During the tremendous electrical storms characteristic of the hills the clouds dragged along the tops of the ridges; and instead of leaping harmlessly from thunder-cap to cap the white bolts stabbed down in perpendicular lines, slaughtering the Norway pines and frequently finding human victims. Such rebukes from the medicine of the place were not to be ignored. The red man was welcome to come for game and lodge-poles and to pass through the hundred and twenty miles of gulches and valleys, but he must not tarry after his immediate needs were satisfied.

Sentimentalists lamented that the Indian was induced, or compelled, to give up this portion of his territory, which by the treaty of 1867 extended to the Big Horn Mountains. But it was not in accordance with the white man's ideas of economics that mineral wealth should be lost in order that the region should afford a rich hunting-ground.

In all justice and decency the Indian might have been allowed a royalty from the mineral development of the country, and permitted to work in the diggings did he so choose. It is very improbable that a plains Indian would have cared to dwell for any length of time directly beneath the thunderbolts, let the reward in yellow metal be ever so great. But it is possible that an equitable arrangement might have been made whereby he would have profited in proportion to the amount of gold and silver recovered. Had such an offer been made to him it at least would have gone far to convince him of the white man's sense of justice.

Red Cloud, the scarlet blankets of whose warriors once caused entire ridges to glow, was one of those in 1876 to see the hopelessness of further opposition and to agree to the surrender of the gold-lands. But there were many reservation Indians who stubbornly opposed the cession, while those not yet living on reservations scorned the proposition to the last.

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IT WAS late afternoon when the gambler and Dinsdale rode into the soldiers' camp on Red Cañon Creek. Here they enjoyed the first palatable water they had found since leaving Hat Creek. The camp was defended by rifle-pits, and only a few men were present, the others being off on a scout. From a sergeant the wayfarers learned that two wagons with eight men had left for the cañon shortly after the noon hour, having tired of waiting for another outfit to come up.

"They ought to be well inside by this time," commented the sergeant.

Then gloomily—

"Hope they don't have no break-downs."

"The cañon is a bad place for break-downs," agreed San Juan. "They were foolish not to wait until dark."

"I tried to get them to wait until some of the men got back, so we could send an escort through with them. But they wouldn't listen," said the sergeant.

Dinsdale asked no questions as to when they should set out. He knew that his companion was familiar with the route and its dangers. While their horses rested they gave a final overhauling to their arms and saddle gear. As they worked, or idled and smoked, Dinsdale's gaze frequently roamed toward the mouth of the cañon less than a mile away.

At sunset they ate supper, messing with the soldiers, and then smoked for a while. Finally San Juan Joe rose briskly and glanced at the moon crawling above the horizon, greatly magnified and blood-red. Its sanguine light riddled a ribbon of clouds and turned them into reddish smoke.

"Looks like all —— was burning," lazily remarked Dinsdale.

"It usually is," was the grave reply. "Means that some one is cutting the deuce in this deal."

"What do the cards say; or haven't you tried them?"

"Ran them off while you was tending your nag. They run all right for us. We'll go."

Dinsdale glanced at his watch as they entered the mouth of the cañon and observed that it was eight o'clock. The moonlight vaguely illuminated the way and accentuated the height of the steep walls. The place was well called a trap, for once a band of travelers was caught life would depend on its ability to inflict defeat on a foe that had the advantage of position and a surprize attack.

They walked their horses and listened for the sound of a dislodged pebble from the loose red sandstone rocks above their heads. Each moment they expected to behold the flash of guns fired from ambush. At this slow pace they continued after the moon had satisfied its curiosity and had passed on to other lonely ravines.

The gambler took the lead as the faint light vanished and permitted his horse to pick the way through the thick darkness. Dinsdale's animal followed closely. Gradually Dinsdale developed the illusion of being surrounded by immeasurable open country until it seemed that he was free to gallop in any direction.

Then came a more disquieting fancy: He was riding along the crest of a ridge. The way scarcely afforded room for his horse's cautious hoofs, and one false step would be equivalent to a drop into oblivion. The ebon darkness took on shapes and colors until he could make out the endless mouth of an abyss on each side. The narrow way was brown and in places tinged with red. The inky ribbon close beside him was the maw of the chasm. Once, when his horse stumbled, he gave an involuntary little cry.

"What's the trouble?" softly called San Juan from out of the blackness.

"—— nerves fooled me," sheepishly explained Dinsdale.

Soon after this incident Dinsdale's objective senses ousted all fancies. San Juan also heard it, the ominous sound of several guns fired in a volley, quickly followed by two or three isolated shots. The firing was faint as if far off.

The gambler backed his horse beside Dinsdale's and softly whispered—

"Told you some one was cutting the deuce."

"It's quiet enough now," murmured Dinsdale.

"Too quiet. Means it's all over—all ended—all the chips in the pot. Some one has cashed in for keeps."

"We go ahead?"

"Yes."

He spoke to his horse, and they rode on.

"If the Sioux have made a killing they'll not be venturing down here for fear of running into the soldiers," continued Joe.

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"They'll be wanting to take their scalps and get away."

They walked their horses for half an hour, and Dinsdale was beginning to believe the alarms of the night had been exhausted when the gambler swore softly and warned—

"They're coming!"

Dinsdale cut in ahead of him, both hand guns drawn, and sharply said:

"No place for rifles! I'm using hand guns. Shoot by the flash of them if you can."

"I'm sitting in with my derringers. They'll know I'm dealing."

And Joe's stirrup rubbed against Dinsdale's.

The horses stood motionless, their ears pricked forward to catch the telltale sounds. Dinsdale suddenly whispered:

"No Injun's feet making that racket! White man's boots. Only one man at that. Keep behind me so we won't be shooting each other."

San Juan fell back. Dinsdale cocked a gun and held it half-raised. The clattering footsteps drew nearer. The affair took on a new complexion when a shrill scream of despair cut the night; and Dinsdale felt the roots of his hair prickling as he pictured the panther spring of a Sioux on the back of the victim. The scream was answered by a chorus of diabolical howls.

Again came the terrified cry, and the gambler exclaimed—

"A woman!"

"She must have broken loose from them!" Dinsdale cried. "Here she is!" His ears told him of the woman's proximity. He leaped from the saddle, groped with his hands and threw his arms about a wildly struggling form.

"Stop your squalling!" he harshly commanded.

Then to the gambler— "I've got her."

And to the woman—

"Hush your noise, child."

For the figure was very slight.

"We're white and friends," he added.

"Save me! Save me!" she faintly shrieked now clinging to him. "Save me, or kill me!"

"Get her on to the horse. We must ride through them," softly warned the gambler.

He drove his horse alongside Dinsdale and cried:

"Hi, girl! Keep shut if you want to be saved. You're all right."

The Indians redoubled their ferocious cries as Dinsdale mounted and pulled the girl up after him, much as if she had been a bag of meal. He drew her across the horse behind him and directed:

"Sit straddle! Arms around my waist. My waist, not my neck! All ready, Joe. Let her go!"

The Indians, confident of soon overtaking their victim, were using time and breath in voicing their blood-curdling cries. With no thought of danger they were running in a group and howling exultingly as they caught the sound of frantic, clattering footsteps. They had heard the girl cry out but attached no significance to it. They never dreamed that succor was at hand for her until they heard the thudding of swift hoofs, and then it was too late for them to take shelter.

For a moment they listened, astounded. Then Dinsdale and the gambler were upon them, both hands of each spitting fire. The first flashes of Dinsdale's heavy guns revealed the position of the Indians; then it was over before the red men had had time to realize it had commenced.

With the crashing boom of the big Colts and the murderous bark of the derringers three of the five bucks dropped on the cañon floor and went to talk with the ghosts. The other two managed to crawl to one side, bleeding profusely. Fifty rods up the cañon Dinsdale checked the mad rush of his horse and warned:

"Those ahead must have heard our guns. They'll be laying for us."

From behind them rose the ululating cry of a wolf, a signal of discovery. The cry quavered and abruptly ceased as a wounded warrior reached the maximum of effort.

"That tells the others the whole story. We must be out of this before daylight—and no turning back. Hi, girl, how many were there of them?"

The girl moaned hysterically and clutched the speaker's waist more tightly. Dinsdale reached back and pinched her ear, and commanded:

"Stop that noise. How many jumped you?"

"They fired from the sky. They killed Belman and his wife. They killed the Stacey brothers. Young Dawley fired back. They dropped from the sky and used clubs. Oh! Oh! Oh! With clubs! Young Dawley. A dozen, like pictures of devils. Out of the black sky almost into our fire."

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"Call it thirteen," said Dinsdale to his companion.

"Five or six out of it already. Six or seven left——! Not enough for breakfast! Load up and get going, Pete," snarled the gambler.

"A moment. I'm loaded. Stop your noise, girl, or they'll have your scalp."

On swept the horses at a gallop. They plunged recklessly down a steep grade, and their riders were blind men because of the velvet darkness. Then appeared a slight suggestion of light ahead, and this when reached became an abrupt turn in the cañon wall.

Rounding it, they beheld the source of the faint illuminations—a rosy bed of coals, with flames licking through the charred embers of two wagons. The ground was strewn with boxes and bales, and the horses had been butchered. But what constituted a more horrible litter were the mutilated forms within the zone of light.

The girl had named four dead men and one woman. Her rescuers counted nine stark figures, which meant the Belman outfit had been wiped out with the exception of one—the girl.

"Watch sharp!" yelled San Juan, galloping into the lead with the reins in his teeth and his derringers ready.

There was no sign of the enemy on the cañon floor, and the riders devoted their attention to the walls of broken rock now faintly illumined by the fire. Thirty feet up and on the right-hand side something moved and dislodged pebbles.

Instantly Dinsdale threw up a gun and began firing. With the third bullet a savage rolled down the uneven slope and sprawled grotesquely across a boulder. He wore three feathers of the golden, or war, eagle in his long black hair. The red paint along the median line of the hair was conspicuous.

To count coup Dinsdale bent low to one side, and the girl screamed for him not to drag her from the horse. He snatched away the feathers, only to drop them as several bullets whistled about his head.

San Juan Joe was firing at the left-hand wall. Rifles bellowed an answer, filling the cañon with crashing echoes. A dead warrior, his head smashed by a heavy derringer bullet, hung over a rock, his hands hanging down as if he were trying to reach the rifle just below him. Then in a few mighty springs the frightened horses turned a bend in the road and leaped into the darkness. Dinsdale felt the girl's arms relaxing. Replacing his belt guns, he reached around and caught her just as she began to topple into the road. He pulled her around in front of him and placed a hand over her heart. She still lived.

"——, what a rip-roaring celebration Deadwood would have if we could pack that hair into town!" yelled the gambler. "If it wasn't for the kid——"

"She's gone off the hooks. Hurt or fainted. Ride beside me and steady her while I load. There may be more ahead."

San Juan took the girl in his arms.

"She don't weigh more'n a deck of cards," he remarked. "Skinny little thing, but she's got regular hair. I don't think she was hit."

"I'll take her now. Lead the way till she gets her senses back and can ride behind me. Five of those red gentlemen have whittled their last notch in their coup sticks."

"And they're all good agency Injuns! Betting ten to nothing every one of them has a certificate of good character from the Injun inspector."

After a mile of reckless traveling the gambler drew rein and listened. There was no sound of pursuit. Then he said:

"It's near here. Can you hear it? Running water on the right. The spring where the Metz family was wiped out. Five men and two women."

The girl gave a little shiver and began to weep.

"She's come to her senses," Dinsdale announced. "Get some water and perhaps she'll feel better. Are you hurt, girl? And what's your name?"

"I ain't hurt! Wish I was dead. I'm Lottie Carl," she moaned. "They dropped down out of the sky and began shooting. The Stacey boys was mending a broken wheel by the fire."

"Any of your folks with them?" gently asked Dinsdale.

"None of my folks. I ain't got any. But they was good to me. Only friends I had. Then they dropped out of the sky like big black birds. They fell almost into our fire. The Staceys and the Belmans was killed in a jiffy. Oh!"

"Give her some of this," spoke up San Juan.

And Dinsdale's groping hand found a tin

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dipper. The girl drank a few mouthfuls and began coughing.

"Tastes queer," she choked.

"Little whisky in it to warm you up. We've no time to lose."

"Can you ride behind me now?" asked Dinsdale.

"Here in front. I'm 'fraid of the dark when I ride behind you. I'd feel them clawing at me."

She broke off into more sobbing. Dinsdale sighed resignedly, and, supporting her with one arm, gave the word for his companion to set the pace. In this fashion they came to the upper end of the cañon and into the dawn.

Both stared curiously at the one survivor of the massacre. She was slight of physique, thin of face from horror and probably privations. She looked undernourished, and her coarse gown and man's boots did not make for attractiveness. San Juan Joe, however, something of an expert in feminine appraisals, mentally decided that her large gray eyes and wealth of chestnut hair would some day transform her into a beauty.

"How old are you, girl?" he asked.

"Seventeen," she answered, studying them with great frankness.

Dinsdale mumbled—

"Thought you was a mite of a child, not more than thirteen by the heft of you."

"I ain't very hefty," she admitted. "We was Ohio folks. Now they're all dead. Wish I was with them!"

"That's no way to talk," said Dinsdale. "Troubles are all ended. You'll live to be a very old lady and wear specs. What's what, can't be helped. Get your nerves together. Better times just around the corner. Tell us how you managed to get away from them."

Her lips trembled, but this time she fought down the hysteria and managed to explain:

"They was so sure of me. I was crazy from it all. They got to dancing. They began hurting the poor dead bodies. Oh, but that was awful!"

She ceased speaking and bit her lips. Again conquering her weakness, she went on:

"It was while they was busy that I started to walk away. I was hoping they'd kill me quick. Before I knew it I was at the turn in the road. Beyond that the light didn't shine. I began running. I guess you know the rest.

"I couldn't run very fast in these," and she thrust forward a boot. "Seems as if they didn't want to catch me at first. They was hooting and laughing as they come after me. That's about all."

"Now I know what 'trouble' the cards meant last night, and who had to cut the deuce," remarked the gambler.

They took to an old lodge-pole trail and followed it to Pleasant Valley. On the way they passed an old Indian camp, a temporary shelter while new lodge-poles were being cut. In the immediate foreground were small hills covered with aspen, spruce and tamarack, while above these and stretching up to the horizon were the somber pines. Lottie Carl showed some animation on sighting two deer, but the illimitable sorrow still remained in her big eyes.

Beside a spring the men halted and produced bacon, bread and coffee. The gambler started to cook the breakfast, but the girl insisted on taking charge of the coffee-pot and frying-pan, and gravely informed him—

"It's for the woman to get the meals."

San Juan stepped back and stared whimsically at Dinsdale. Like an old housewife, weighted with responsibilities, the girl fried the bacon and made the coffee, then fried the bread in the bacon fat. She had been used to hard work. After they had eaten and while she was washing the utensils at the spring San Juan murmured—

"What's to be done with her?"

Dinsdale frowned and rubbed his jaw, then gave it up.

"Time enough to decide that when we get to Deadwood," he said. "By that time she can tell things about herself without going off the handle. She must have some sort of relations back in Ohio."

"Kitty will take care of her," mused the gambler.

"Kitty?" repeated Dinsdale, searching his memory for something the name almost suggested.

"Friend of mine. Good friend, too."

Dinsdale turned and glanced at the girl. She was an awkward and pathetic figure, but there was no denying the glory of her hair and eyes. She had finished at the spring and was picking service-berries in the frying-pan.

"You're right," spoke up San Juan. "The

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average woman with just her eyes, or just her hair, would make herself a screaming beauty."

"Not just what I was thinking. Perhaps pretty near it, though."

Lottie Carl was next tempted by branches loaded with choke-cherries, and as she gathered them she passed into a thicket of box elder and hazel and was lost to view.

"It won't do to stick here any longer. We're too near the cañon. The Injuns may be sneaking round these parts. We must be going."

The clangorous cry of a crane startled the girl. She gave a little scream, caught her foot in a tangle of grapevine and Virginia creeper and fell with a crash.

Believing the Indians had attacked her, the two men with drawn guns plunged to the rescue. They found her in tears and blindly trying to pick up some of the spilled fruit. They laughed boisterously and assured her she was perfectly safe. Yet their nerves had been shaken. It was only luck that a crane instead of an Indian had frightened her. Nor did she miss the significance of their drawn weapons.

While they were strapping on the saddle-rolls the girl wandered to one side, and, dropping on her knees, began examining something in the grass. San Juan watched her for a moment and with a chuckle whispered:

"—— me if she hasn't located that old grave of an Injun's victim. I was forgetting it was there."

Dinsdale hurried to the girl and told her they must start at once. She wished to delay until she had cleared away the grass and had read the inscription carved on the slab headboard.

"It's a grave," she murmured. "Think how the person buried there don't mind a bit how many Injuns come into these parts. Just can't be hurt or scared."

Dinsdale hastily explained it was the grave of a bull-whacker who had died from drinking too much poor whisky, but her steady gaze told him she was not believing him.

THEY followed the road toward Custer City and frequently passed old prospect holes, dug the year before, and not a few deserted cabins. At midday they rounded a low hill and came n sight of the town, the first to be laid out in the Black Hills and now an excellent example of a "busted" boom. The location was beautiful, being an open park with gently rising hills leading up to a rock-ribbed horizon tufted by the dark pines. The town itself consisted of several hundred log and board structures, regularly laid out in streets.

Until the Spring stampede to Deadwood Gulch the place had been lively enough, and its founders had been so sure of its importance that Southerners and Northerners had quarreled whether it should be called Stonewall or Custer. Until its abandonment the town lots had steadily increased in value, and every property owner became a real-estate speculator. Gold was the medium of exchange in other camps; but in Custer City land titles had been even better than the yellow metal. The first truth a newcomer to Custer learned in the boom days was the vital importance of owning one or more town lots.

In 1875, when white men were tabu in the hills, it had been a magic town, with a main street half a mile long and crowded with business houses and disreputable resorts. Now its merchants and gamblers and its painted women were hunting their profits in Deadwood City. The stunted growth on the eastern knolls and the ancient forests on the western heights beheld three sawmills on French Creek furnishing the only employment for those who remained.

There were some hundred and fifty inhabitants, mostly men, in the town, with row after row of dwellings left to the ravages of squirrels and kindred mischief-workers. Those who did not labor in the mills clung tenaciously to their property, waiting for the town to enter upon a new lease of prosperity, or worked the placers beside the sluggish current. And yet French Creek gold, what there was of it, was the purest on the continent and equal to the best Australia had produced.

San Juan took his companions to a hotel where the girl was given a room while the men ordered dinner. The gambler was thoughtful enough to procure a comb and brush and a roll of ribbon and send them up to Lottie Carl, a little attention Dinsdale wished he had thought of first.

In another way San Juan seemed to be calloused. He had thought it a joke that the girl had stumbled upon the grave of a massacre victim, and it had been left for

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Dinsdale to draw her from the gruesome discovery. Dinsdale began to wonder if his new friend was not a strange compound.

When Lottie Carl rejoined them they nodded approval. Although her pale face and thin features made her look all eyes there was no ignoring her neatly brushed hair, fine as spun silk and held tidily in place by some of the new ribbon. She glanced shyly at them and said—

"I ain't thanked you for what you've done for me."

"Never mention it," said San Juan, bowing gallantly. "Now we'll eat."

He ushered them into the dining-room, pulled out a chair for Lottie Carl and seated her with quite the grand manner. Dinsdale couldn't decide whether he was giving a burlesque of politeness, or was genuinely pleased to distract the girl's thoughts from herself by graceful attentions. His first speech was brusk enough, for he said:

"Pitch in and fill up, girl. We've got a long ride ahead. We're taking you to Deadwood, where a friend of mine will look after you and get something civilized for your feet in place of those brogans."

The fare was bountiful, and Lottie Carl found that the tragedy had not killed her appetite. They had finished and the gambler was cutting the end from a cigar when a man rushed into the room and hoarsely cried out:

" 'Wild Bill's been shot! Done to death from behind by that dirty snake of a Jack McCall! —— him! If Deadwood City ain't stretched his mis'rable weasan', afore now it oughter be busted flatter than this town even is."

The girl gave a little cry of horror at this advertisement of more brutality. Dinsdale half-rose from his chair and fell back again. San Juan held the cigar and long knife in his two hands motionless for a few moments, then slowly restored the blade to the sheath, worn inside his coat, and in a low voice demanded—

"Is that straight, partner?"

"Just as sure as Injuns like scalps. As straight as McCall is crooked," hotly replied the man. "That low-down skunk of a murderer!"

"But Wild Bill Hickock! Some one got the drop on Wild Bill?" incredulously gasped Dinsdale.

"Got the drop ——" howled the newsbearer. "McCall took grub-stakes from him. Made off to be everlastingly obliged to him. Then stood behind him while Bill was playing a few cards and shot him through the back of the head. S'pose that skunk would 'a' dared make a move if Wild Bill had had half a eye on him? An' at that Bill had a gun pulled clear of the holster an' cocked when they picked him up from the table where he fell, face down."

San Juan sorrowfully lamented.

"Wild Bill was white. Too bad. Too bad."

They left the dining-room and found that the hotel and town was alive with the news. From the hotel proprietor San Juan bought a roll of blankets for the girl and some cooked food, and hired a horse. When they struck on the corduroy road that led to Deadwood City San Juan was keen to make fast time; but the girl, wearied by her terrible experiences and unused to horseback riding, made haste an impossibility. Dinsdale detected his companion's impatience and suggested that he ride on ahead adding—

"I'll fetch Lottie Carl along."

"No; I'll stick along with you two. There's probably some excitement in town over Wild Bill's death, and I'd like to be there."

There was much dead timber still standing on the hills along the road, and the effect would have been funereal if it had not been for the birds. Their chatter and activity appealed to Lottie Carl and helped her to overlook much that was dreary.

Robins were feeding with red-shafted woodpeckers. In the open woodlands were Rocky-Mountain bluebirds, vivacious in song even if less mellow of note than their Eastern relative. Beautiful purple martins hopped busily about the topmost branches of dead pines, while in the lower branches of the same trees violet-green swallows gave a pleasing touch of color. Lottie Carl even smiled when buffalo-birds fearlessly flew under the horses and all but lighted upon her shoulder.

Less pleasing were the glimpses caught of gray timber-wolves, furtive, shadowy figures, moving in twos and threes, and effacing themselves noiselessly. Lottie Carl shuddered on beholding them. Not because they were wolves, but because their stealth reminded her of the Sioux.

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The occasional skeleton of a buffalo testified to the huge game animal's presence in the hills before the white men began cutting down his range on the plains. Five rows of buffalo skulls, twelve to a row, painted with blue and red stripes and circles and all facing the east, told of the days when the red man associated the creature in some way with the ruling genius of the hills.

Overhead and without any discernible effort floated a golden eagle, whose plumage for war decorations was so highly esteemed by Cheyenne and Sioux as to give him a market value of two ponies in either nation.

But what the men were looking for and were missing was the sight of flannel-shirted miners in the many ravines and gulches. The landscape was bare of men, and yet the hills held thousands who had dared the journey for the privilige of hunting for gold in lonely places.

The travelers passed through fair valleys, richly grassed, that would have delighted the heart of the husbandman. Yet the background was ever the same, no matter whither the road lead—rocky heights covered with pine. According to Dinsdale's count they crossed Spring Creek thirty-one times in traveling a dozen miles. They made their camp on the headwaters of this stream, and built a lean-to, or half-faced camp, for the girl. She insisted on attending to the cooking.

Early in the morning, while the valley was still swathed in white fog, they were up and eating and soon on their way. A short ride brought them to Hill City, which interested Dinsdale hugely. There were two hundred log houses, many of them uncompleted, and not a solitary inhabitant.

Deadwood City again was the answer for this wholesale abandonment. Once the citizens heard of the poor man's diggings in the northern gulch they had stampeded as one.

"But why didn't we come here instead of camping in the open?" asked Dinsdale as they rode by the deserted town. "There would have been sixty-six houses for each one of us."

San Juan jerked his head toward Lottie Carl and murmured:

"Sometimes these empty houses may have overnight tenants. It's possible some of the road-agents hide up there for a bit. No place to take a young girl into."

THAT noon they rode into Rapid City on the creek of the same name. This town and its immediate environs were bustling with mining activities, the first the travelers had witnessed since leaving Red Cañon. The town was situated in a wonderful valley and at a point where the creek emerges from a deep cañon. The stream, San Juan explained, was the only one flowing southeast that made good its mountain boast by refusing to lose itself in the plains, and actually emptied into the South Fork of the Cheyenne.

They stopped only long enough to eat although several citizens, unheard by the girl, warned the men that it was dangerous to travel the stage road. Three men had been found that morning, scalped and mutilated after the Sioux fashion, within half a mile of the town.

It was at Rapid City that the gambler and Dinsdale learned how McCall, slayer of Wild Bill, had been arraigned the night before by a so-called "citizens' " or "miners' " committee, had been acquitted and furnished with a good horse and allowed to try his luck in escaping from the hills. And there were those who had watched the stage road ever since the word was received, hoping that the murderer would ride within range of their rifles.

"Let him go, eh?" mused San Juan. "That's too bad! Wonder what's behind it?"

"Looks as if he might be able to tell things that some one doesn't want told," commented Dinsdale savagely.

Fourteen miles were covered before San Juan selected the next camping-place, a restful spot in Spring Valley. After the girl's little shelter had been erected and while she was making the coffee and arranging their cooked food on a flat rock Dinsdale went on a scout. His supper would have been cold when he returned after dusk had not Lottie Carl taken care to keep it warm. He reported that there were no fresh Indian signs.

"Then we'll go through flying tomorrow," said the gambler.

"What'll I do when we git there?" timidly asked Lottie Carl.

"My friend will take care of you."

"Or you can work in some family," added Dinsdale. "You'll do all right, don't fear."

"I'll be glad to work. I'm used to working," she told them.

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She retired early, leaving Dinsdale to his pipe and the gambler to his long cigars. San Juan was in a talkative mood and told much hills history. He declared gold was found by white men ten years at least before the discovery was made in Alder Gulch, Montana. Jim Beckwourth, breed leader of the Crows, had found gold along various creeks as early as Fifty-nine. And, he added, the Sioux in the one year of Sixty-four had traded more than twenty thousand dollars' worth of dust and nuggets at Fort Laramie.

The night passed quietly, and another ride into the white fog was commenced. This phenomenon, Dinsdale learned, was characteristic of the hills, and was caused by currents of warm air from the plains ascending the slopes to condense on the higher levels.

A few miles out from their last camp they overtook a man leading a diminutive burro. The animal was all but concealed by camping-gear, tent and blankets. Lashed on top of the load was a Henry rifle, forerunner of the Winchester. Dinsdale's interest was aroused, as this was the first solitary prospector he had seen at any distance from a town. Juan waved his hand and saluted:

"How now, 'Pyrites?' Another rich strike?"

The man halted and blinked up at them, revealing a weather-worn face that was traversed by a network of tiny wrinkles. The light-blue eyes held an owlish solemnity, and this effect was heightened by the highly arched brows. At first Dinsdale thought the fellow was greatly surprized at meeting them, but he soon observed that it was his usual facial expression. From the corner of his mouth San Juan informed Dinsdale:

"Old 'Iron Pyrites,' best sample of perpetual prospector you ever saw. He'd quit millions in a sure thing to pan out new gravel. I grubstake him."

"Howdy, Joey!" joyously cried Pyrites, now finding his tongue. "Ain't struck anything but rich prospects this trip, but I'll uncover the real article on the next. Found some mighty rich indications. Who's your friends?"

The gambler made Lottie Carl and Dinsdale known, and briefly told of the massacre in the cañon. If possible the arched brows crawled higher, and Pyrites stared sympathetically at the girl.

"Too bad, younker," he said. "But this is a mighty fine country to forgit things in. No time to think of yesterday when something brand new is tearing, plumb bang, over the next ridge to meet up with you in the morning. You've heard about Bill, Joey?"

San Juan nodded gloomily, then exclaimed in deep disgust—

"And to think of letting that McCall go free!"

This was news to Pyrites, for he fairly yelled:

"Go free? Why, Joey, they just couldn't. They had to hang him! They oughter peg him out alive on the Little Missouri for some of the Sioux to find and play with. The Ogalalas would have his hide off in less'n ten minutes. You can't mean that they didn't hang him on the spot!"

The gambler repeated what had been told him at Rapid City. Once Pyrites was convinced that the murderer's innocence already had been proclaimed by a mob tribunal he swore vehemently. The girl showed alarm, and Dinsdale signaled for a change of the conversation. Pyrites was slow to catch the hint from the gambler, but finally did so, and complained:

"Run out of grub, or I'd 'a' made your eyes bung out. Know what I'm after now, Joey? Silver. Yes, siree! Hill and bare diggings are all right. I ain't any fault to find in *them*. I began sampling them back in California when I was a younker. I know what they be in Nevada and Montana. But for a real strike give me a big silver ledge. Mind you, I never turn my back on gold; but it's silver that's going to make us everlastingly rich, Joey. One more grubstake—as I figger it—will land you and me plump in the lap of luxury."

"But silver?" demurred San Juan with a side wink at Dinsdale.

"Ain't they struck the right signs on the Cora? That's within ten miles of Deadwood. That mine will assay twelve thousand dollars to the ton."

"Maybe, but I'll believe it after they've put a shaft down. Better stick to gold, Pyrites," laughingly warned the gambler.

"It's silver, and I know what I'm yarning about, Joey," was the dogged reply. "Why, boy, do you know what I found on the north fork of Battle Crick?"

He paused to enjoy the dramatic expectancy of his listeners. The gambler humored him by slowly shaking his head.

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Pyrites advanced to his climax by triumphantly crying:

"The miners up there are bothered by a heavy black sand that gits into their sluice-boxes! There! What do you think of that?"

"I'd say they are playing in hard luck."

"Oh, good Lord! Hard luck!" cried Pyrites. "Mean you ain't got the nub of it? Didn't I see the same thing happen in Colorado in the boom days of Pike's Peak?"

"Very likely. But I didn't."

"Joey, you're just a child when you're away from your tables. The old man was forgetting that. That heavy black sand that the Battle Crick miners are cussing to tatters and heaving back into the crick is carbonates of lead, carrying eternal fortunes in silver. There! Now the cat's out of the bag. And those fools are dumping it into the crick, or throwing it on to the tailings."

San Juan Joe's black eyes brightened.

"Call around to my place and get your stake. If you walk smart you can travel with us."

But Pyrites was not quite ready to return to Deadwood.

"I want to go a bit slow along here," he explained. "Two or three likely-looking spots I want to look at. It's so close to the road that no one bothers to prospect it. Anywhere around here may be rich alluvium. Once I hit it I can trace it back to the hills. But I'll be in town as soon as you are, I reckon."

"Tell him of the three men found dead near Rapid City," urged Dinsdale.

Pyrites overheard the warning, and with a grin he stepped back and patted the Henry rifle strapped to the burro's load.

"I wake up like a wildcat when I strike Injun signs," he assured Dinsdale. "They'll never prospect my hair and pass it around on a pole."

"What if they jumped you while your rifle is hitched to the burro?" protested Dinsdale.

Grinning slyly, Pyrites reached inside his blouse and pulled out a Colt, cap-and-ball pattern, the favorite with many old-timers, like Hickock, long after the cartridge gun superseded it. Dinsdale looked his disgust; for although the weapon was fully as accurate as his own hand guns it must be reloaded if wet, and loading took time. He considered it to be poor fighting gear in the dews and fog and rains of the hills.

"He's all right. He's lived until September so far, and I reckon he'll keep on living for another month this year. Let's be jogging along," spoke up San Juan. "If I had his luck in dodging Injuns I'd never run another game but spend my time breaking faro banks."

Pyrites' grin broadened. Restoring his weapon, he fumbled in a pocket and produced a tiny nugget. This he gave to the wondering Lottie Carl, saying:

"You keep that. It's good medicine, younker. Maybe it'll fetch you a rich husband."

And he laughed boisterously.

As they rode on the girl looked back; perhaps it was the first gift she had ever received. But Pyrites had turned to one side to pan some gravel and was no longer to be seen.

Progress was slow, little better than a walk, because of Lottie Carl; and night found them a good ride from Deadwood City. San Juan Joe, however, accepted the delay philosophically and continued to be an ideal companion. The nervous haste to get back to the gulch, so obvious in the morning, was entirely lacking, and he entered upon the work of preparing their last camp with the zest of a school-boy released for the holidays. Lottie Carl, too, showed great improvement in spirits and kept them company for an hour or so, listening intently to their talk.

CHAPTER III

THE TOWN OF HIGH PROMISE

THEY halted their horses at the top of a steep descent early in the afternoon and gazed down into the lower end of Deadwood Gulch. The gulch seemed to end abruptly against a ridge in the middle distance, but San Juan explained that its course was very winding and that it was fully ten miles long. Both sides of the road were lined with log cabins, shanties of rough boards, and tents.

"It ain't very pretty to look at," dubiously commented Lottie Carl, gazing disapprovingly at the scattered dead pines, the survivors of fires and wind-falls.

"This is Montana City. Next comes Elizabeth Town, then Deadwood City. Gayville and Crook City are beyond Deadwood. Almost one continuous settlement, you know."

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"I agree with Lottie. It isn't much to look at," said Dinsdale.

"Forget the scenery, man. Remember that Deadwood City wasn't laid out till last May, and that all supplies and the machinery for the sawmills had to be freighted in for two hundred and fifty miles with much of the road being in hostile country. One of the first things to be done was to put up a double line of block-houses on Deadwood and Whitewood Creeks. Deadwood is a great town. No other like it in the world."

And in saying this the gambler spoke with but little if any exaggeration; for the mining-camp at the junction of the two creeks was a miracle of American enthusiasm and enterprise. Up to the middle of May it had been a tangled wilderness, with the growth so thick and impenetrable that the Government exploring-expedition of the previous year, sent out to confirm the Custer expedition of Seventy-four, had not entered the gulch at all.

Since the middle of May, when Craven Lee and Isaac Brown built the first pine log cabin and helped to lay out the streets with a lariat in lieu of a surveyor's chain, it had grown into a business center of feverish activity. Yet the approach to it up the gulch had none of the appeal of the open woodlands and broad parks in the south.

On each side, and too intimate to be softened into a rugged harmony, were the flanks of fire-swept ridges, and a débris of prostrate trees. Scattering dead pines still stood erect, and some of these had been slain by celestial fire as the outcome of the Thunder Birds' quarrel with the Snake. Sluice-boxes followed the road on both sides.

For animation there was a six-horse stage coach on its way to Sidney, destined to be held up by road-agents in some of the lonely gulches, or at the Cheyenne or Hat Creek. There were two hunters packing in on horses the carcasses of white-tail deer, probably shot at some small lick on the upper waters of Elk Creek, where, the Indians said, the deer "went to eat the ground." Their reward for venturing so far and bringing back venison would be rich once they reached Deadwood City. And there was much passing back and forth of miners, and of men who wanted to be miners but did not dare venture into unclaimed territory.

Dinsdale and Lottie Carl inventoried the grim ridges and the passing life; but the sights were too well known to the gambler to register more than a scratch on his consciousness.

He dismounted before Parkhust's "Lager Beer Saloon" on the left of the road and announced:

"This is the beginning of Deadwood City. Let's have a glass of beer."

"I'll stay here with Lottie," replied Dinsdale.

San Juan was soon back. As he swung into the saddle he told Dinsdale it was true that Wild Bill's slayer had been acquitted and allowed to leave the town. Then they were riding through the main street of Deadwood, where it broadened out to a width of twenty yards, but with growing trees and ugly stumps still waiting to be removed from the highway.

On that August day seven-eighths of the Black Hills population, or some seven thousand people, were in the town. And it was estimated that seven out of every ten lacked employment and were living from hand to mouth. While justly called the "poor man's diggings" there was scant opportunity for late arrivals to go prospecting so long as the fear of the Sioux held the people close to the town. All the placers in Deadwood Gulch had been taken up during the first rush, and quartz-mining had not yet started to absorb the idle.

The main street on both sides was compactly filled with two-story wooden structures, shanties, big and small tents, and queer combinations of log and canvas. There were business houses, eating-houses, hotels, dance-halls and wash-houses, with gambling-hells occupying almost every alternate site. Various small tents displayed placards, showing that a doctor or a lawyer or a cobbler dwelt therein.

From the upper stories of the more pretentious buildings peered women's faces. There were many noble women, who had preferred chancing fate in company with their husbands to seeing them set off alone for the hills. And there were many women of painted faces, brought up in Montana camps, or fresh from the railroad towns—no worse than the men who had been responsible for the elasticity of their virtue, and who could never be accused of cowardice now they had taken the man's risk in running the red gantlet. And there were many

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children who were learning to hush their cries when the mother whispered—

"The Sioux!"

The talk of the milling crowds was not of gold but of Indians. Even the Chinese laundrymen abandoned their work in the Centennial Wash-House and loitered outdoors to pick up scraps of information concerning the warriors of Crazy Horse.

Two scenes left lasting impressions on Dinsdale's mind as he and his companions rode through the shifting throngs. In the middle of the street a dozen men were holding a prayer-meeting, oblivious to the swirling life about them. A few rods up the street a loud-voiced auctioneer was asking bids for an Indian scalp and skull, trophies recently brought in by some lucky prospector. The calm faith of those singing an old hymn, and the eager bids hurled at the auctioneer, were samples of the town's variety. For there were men and women who brought their religion with them to Deadwood; and there were many who made much of a white man's success over a foe who had killed four hundred since the beginning of June, whose record for the last eight days were eighty whites slain.

San Juan Joe was one of the best-known men in the gulch. Decent men, as well as the refuse of the world's quarters, passed through his big gambling-tent. When he was recognized there was a general crowding forward to greet him and learn the latest news from the south. Earnest faces from the praying circle, hard, cruel faces that dared not be seen in San Francisco, or in Eastern centers, weak, dissipated faces that contained no ambition or hope, were lifted to hear his answers. The gambler did not attempt to speak at first, for he was battered with fierce queries from a score of men at once.

"Where's Crook?"

"——! Is the Government going to let them ——s wipe us out?"

"Have the Crows and Shoshone joined Crook yet?"

"Where's Terry? Where's Gibbon?"

"Why don't the soldiers come?"

The gambler raised a hand for silence and briefly recited what little outside news he had picked up while at Bowman's ranch on the Cheyenne. With more detail he told of the massacre in the cañon and was compelled to wait until the chorus of oaths and yells for vengeance had spent itself.

The wild outburst changed to wilder cheers and a tremendous exultation as he spoke of the five Indians slain by him and Dinsdale. Men threw their hats into the air and shook hands with strangers.

"One word more," cried San Juan. "This little lady is Lottie Carl, the only survivor of the Belman outfit."

"Buy her a pair of shoes," howled a citizen.

Deafening cheers greeted the suggestion. A blacksmith, still wearing his leather apron and carrying his sledge, shouted:

"Hooray for five dead skunks, I'll start it with this!"

And, snatching a hat from the nearest head, he dropped into it a tiny bag of dust.

There were many in the gathering who did not know where the next meal was coming from; but there were enough others to swell the contents of the hat. When the collection was handed up to the gambler Dinsdale stripped two greenbacks from a roll as his contribution. Even in the enthusiasm of the moment this act was noted and remembered; for greenbacks were curiosities in the hills and readily commanded a premium of five per cent. San Juan gave generously.

The noisy promoter called for a committee to count the collection. This was done in due form with the gambler as chairman. After a visit to the gold-scales of the nearest store the committee reported that Lottie Carl was richer by thirty-five ounces, or six hundred and forty-seven dollars.

Vociferous cheering greeted the announcement. The hat with its wealth was handed to the flush-faced girl, and as it proved awkward for her to hold, some one handed up a large buckskin bag. After the treasure had been transferred the gambler scaled the hat high in the air for its owner to recover. In mad playfulness a dozen hand guns began cracking, and when the hat settled to the ground it was riddled to ribbons. Lottie Carl was too dazed to speak; but San Juan rose in his stirrups and bellowed—

"The little lady wishes me to thank you for her."

Dinsdale leaned forward and spoke rapidly to the gambler, who stared at him in faint surprize, and replied—

"First time you've mentioned it to me."

"I forgot about it. Heard it at Laramie. May not interest them."

"Everything interests us up here."

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Again rising in his stirrups and waving his hand for attention, San Juan announced—

"My friend, who's just through from Cheyenne and Fort Laramie, says train-robbers held up the train at Ogalala, went through the passengers, took the express and mail."

Low-voiced imprecations rippled through the crowds. Only the great fear of the mighty Sioux nation and its threat to sweep through the hills and exterminate every white person, had restrained the miners from taking up the matter of the many stage-robberies. One man yelped—

"Union Pacific knows now how we feel."

This raised a laugh.

The three rode on with San Juan explaining—

"Not far to my friend's place where we can leave Lottie."

Dinsdale reined in and pointed to a sign on a long log cabin, which read—

Mrs. Colt Takes in Boarders Who Pay Ahead

"Who's Mrs. Colt?" he asked.

"Widow with a rifle. Knows how to use it. Product of the frontier. She has no bad debts."

"Why not take Lottie there?"

"But we've already arranged to take her to see Kitty. Kitty's a wonder."

When they reached the Grand Central Hotel, opposite the Deadwood Theater and Academy of Music—half of boards and half of canvas—Dinsdale again drew rein to read the modest announcement on the big sign—

The Only First-Class Hotel in Deadwood City

He suggested—

"Why not have her boarded there until you can talk it over with your friend?"

"Good Heavens, man! I don't have to talk it over with Kitty," impatiently retorted the gambler.

Dinsdale's face wore a slight frown. He was interested in the less pretentious I. X. L. Hotel, and the Centennial, but made no more suggestions. Lottie Carl gaped in amazement at the strange spectacle of a newspaper office—the *Pioneer*—airily perched high on stilts. Near by was a laundry elevated in a similar manner. San Juan observed her wonderment and explained:

"Gold placers and ledges have the right of way here. Can be followed anywhere. They're hunting for gold under those buildings. If they don't find any the buildings can be boarded up so's to give a ground floor. Only way to make sure you won't have your house torn down or moved is to live in a balloon."

Lottie Carl accepted this as a truth and swept her gaze across the heavens. Next her attention was drawn to the many stores and their lavish display of goods. There was everything for horse and hunter, for wagon-trains and prospector, for home-maker, even to seed for flower and vegetable gardens. Through the open doors and always in the best light stood delicate scales for weighing the gold.

SOON a new note pervaded the street noises—the shrewish clamor of hurdy-gurdies and the crashing babel of overworked pianos, occasionally relieved by the more dulcet harmony of stringed instruments; for they were now in the thick of the dance-halls and tents and bawdy houses. Dinsdale looked very sober. Lottie Carl understood nothing. It was merely so much noise to her.

"This is Kitty's place. Looks better inside," said San Juan, halting before a long two-story building made of rough boards, and having an annex in the form of a big tent.

A passageway of canvas joined the tent to the house. Calling a boy to hold their horses, the gambler dismounted and helped the girl from her horse. Dinsdale moved more slowly, revolving something in his mind. As San Juan started to lead them to a side door of the house Dinsdale touched his arm and in a low voice said:

"I *sabe* now. She's Kitty the Schemer."

"There's only one Kitty, and she certainly is a master-schemer," said San Juan with a laugh.

"I don't like it," persisted Dinsdale. "I warn you I probably shall kick over the traces."

"Not after you've looked into Kitty's eyes."

The side door evidently was something of a private entrance, for it was locked. San Juan gave a sharp double knock. A slide swung back, revealing a small aperture. The opening framed one eye set on the bias, then the door opened and the Chinese attendant stood aside for them to enter. The hall was bare of furnishings, but the stairs leading to the upper floor were heavily and richly carpeted.

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The place was heavy with the smell of musk, of scented tapers and burning joss-sticks, characteristic of Oriental dives and insufferable to Dinsdale and Lottie Carl. The girl sniffed and coughed and drew close to Dinsdale as her eyes met the gaze of the wrinkled-faced Mongolian. The gambler bruskly commanded—

"Tell your mistress I'm here."

With that, and as one well used to the establishment, he ushered them into a room which quite took Lottie Carl's breath away. The furnishings were rich and profuse and entirely concealed the rough board walls. Thick rugs littered the floor, and Chinese silks of weird pattern were utilized to hide the ugly ceiling. There were several pictures, all in heavy gilt frames; and an excellent piano stood against the wall.

The tone of the room was distinctly Oriental, and Lottie Carl continued speechless. It was apparent she had never seen such combinations of colors and comfort.

The gambler watched her with a smile on his lean face. She would be the one to decide, he had assumed, and already he was sure of her verdict. After a life of hardships she would gladly remain in this, to her, fairy environment.

There came the soft swish of skirts in the hall, a pause while a low, musical voice gave an order in Chinese. Then Kitty the Schemer stood inside the door, one of the most picturesque and notorious characters to be found in all the history of mining-camps' *demi-monde*.

She was slight of figure, and her face was youthful and showed no signs of dissipation. Her air was that of innocence, piqued by curiosity. Only those who knew her history could appreciate the dynamic qualities of her spirit. Dinsdale was now recalling how she had, unaided, invaded the Far East and had established two palaces of sin, one in Hongkong, the other in Yokohama.

She took in the three at a glance and extended her slim hand to the gambler. For the first time Dinsdale saw beneath the impassivity of San Juan's face. He clung to her hand and said no word, but his black eyes, blazing down into the upturned face, spoke volumes.

Kitty the Schemer gave an order, again speaking in Chinese, and she had barely finished before a soft-footed servant was depositing a tray of liquid refreshment on a small table. The tray was inlaid with silver and the table enriched with mother-of-pearl. All these accessories—a house filled with them—had been freighted in despite the Sioux. A plate of sandwiches of white bread, shavings of cold meat and curious cakes, the last being the wizardry of her Chinese cook, were also placed on the table.

"Lost your voice, Juan?" she asked, her limpid blue eyes turning in welcome to Dinsdale.

The gambler hastened to present his companions. The woman ignored the girl to study Dinsdale. Her subtle mind quickly formed an estimate, and it was entirely in his favor.

Then she deigned to appraise the girl. The rough boots and the dowdy dress prompted a slight smile. With arched brows she glanced from the coarse dress to her own attire, which typed the daintiest lures that civilized shopping could furnish. From the toe of her bizarre little slippers to the crown of her exquisite coiffure she was faultless. Beside this paragon of frailty Lottie Carl looked very uncouth.

She extended a welcome to Dinsdale, still ignoring Lottie Carl, and said to the gambler:

"Well, Juan, your eyes tell me you love me. But surely you don't bring Mr. Dinsdale along as a witness. What is it?"

"This girl is the only one left of an outfit trapped in Red Cañon. Dinsdale and I fetched her through. We got five of the Sioux."

"Good boy!" she purred. "Now go and get some road-agents. What do you think? They have a new game now. After they say, 'Hands up,' they add, 'Hair down.' And three of my last girls to come through lost all the greenbacks they had hidden in their hair! Talk about taking advantage of a woman! —— take them all! But drink up."

Dinsdale took whisky; the gambler chose wine. Lottie Carl was induced to eat a sandwich, but refused to try the cakes. Then the gambler completed his explanation by saying:

"This girl hasn't any folks. She's all alone in the world. I reckoned you'd take her."

Kitty the Schemer frowned a bit petulantly; then smiled and renewed her inspection of Lottie Carl. "Such detestable boots!" she sighed. "It's hard to see beyond

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them. Yet with proper food— With those eyes—that hair——"

As she hesitated San Juan insisted—

"Surely she would do."

"She might do too well. I'll have no rivals here. Do you know, Juan, it's getting more tiresome every day. I'm more eager than ever to go to South Africa. Think I will. You shall go along with me if you're good."

"I'll go wherever you go, Kitty," he hoarsely murmured. "And the girl?"

"Oh, leave her. I'll see what I can do. Not very interesting to Mr. Dinsdale though, all this."

"I'm keenly interested," corrected Dinsdale, advancing in front of Lottie Carl. "And I'm mighty curious. Just what would her position be here? I'm a stranger in town, but from appearances, the big tent and all, I take it you have lots of company."

She eyed him curiously, a little smile starting to curve her lips but never quite fulfilling its promise.

"You're not one of those Gospel sharps?" she drawled.

"Scarcely that."

"If you are, there's a fine opening for you. Our leading Gospel-slinger wandered outside the town a week ago and was scalped."

Then sharply, like the thrust of a stiletto—

"Just what have you to do with this girl, anyway?"

"Nothing beyond seeing that she is decently housed—referring more to her surroundings than to the furniture. Later on more permanent plans can be made for her."

Kitty the Schemer tossed back her head and laughed lightly, but there was a wicked glint in her eyes as she bantered—

"I'd say, Juan, that you and Mr. Goodman ought to have had a powwow about this child before asking me to take a hand."

San Juan glared at Dinsdale and harshly demanded:

"What the —— is the matter with you? You're acting queer. All the way from Custer City we've been planning to bring the girl here."

"You planned, not I," murmured Dinsdale, pleased to have a man to talk to. "I've decided the girl isn't old enough, or experienced enough, to choose for herself. So I'll choose for her. She's not to come here. You can like it, or leave it."

"Not to come here?" mocked Kitty, approaching close to Dinsdale and tilting back her head. "You may kiss me."

Dinsdale laughed a little awkwardly and gave ground a step. Lottie Carl was watching him with eyes as round as full moons.

"No, you may not kiss her!" warned San Juan, his face paling, his half-closed eyes revealing the heart of a "killer."

"Your friend is about to slay me, Miss Kitty," said Dinsdale, again moving back and now feeling Lottie Carl's fingers clutching his hand as if to hold him clear of temptation. "Not very gallant of me, but after all I have only one life, you know."

"I'm disappointed in you, Mr. Dinsdale," murmured Kitty the Schemer, her eyes boring into his until he felt the force of her threat.

"This is no time for nonsense, Kitty," broke in the gambler. "Dinsdale, you shouldn't tell me to 'like' anything, or 'leave' it."

"And some time you'll ask permission to kiss me," softly murmured Kitty the Schemer, busily thinking murderous thoughts.

Dinsdale faced the gambler, and his embarrassment vanished. He quietly said:

"I was the first to meet her in the cañon. You rode behind me. I was the one to swing her on to a horse—my horse. You helped pot the Indians; but I was the one to pick her off her feet and ride with her. She'll be better off in the Colt woman's boarding-house. 'A frontier woman with a rifle,' you called her."

"I must be poison," trilled Kitty the Schemer with an ugly side glance at San Juan.

"You must be very lovely. You look it," retorted Dinsdale. "But there are those who come here who are not. Now we'll be going, Lottie."

The girl obediently rose. Kitty the Schemer drew a quick breath, and again she questioned the gambler with a glance. San Juan Joe stepped between Dinsdale and the door and said:

"Not so fast. We'll discuss this a bit further."

"You'll get clear of that door, Joe, or we'll discuss it with guns," Dinsdale warned in a low voice.

"A bad-man, eh?" politely asked the gambler.

"A mighty bad man when held back from a door he's set on going through."

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San Juan never lacked in courage. His jealousy of Kitty of two hemispheres could quickly turn him into a madman. But Dinsdale had shown no disposition to come under her power. Men with powerful names in both America and Europe had been found much weaker.

It was difficult for the gambler to hate a man to the edge of death for being proof against the Schemer's lure. Dinsdale had been a good companion. He was a prepossessing young man and might easily interest good women and weak. The gambler gave him a high mark for being indifferent to Kitty. Because he believed he would never have cause for jealousy on Dinsdale's account the gambler lacked heart for what he knew would end in the death of one, perhaps the two, of them.

He sought to temporize until he should decide to just what lengths he would proceed.

"You're no miner," he said thoughtfully.

"Nor merchant. Perhaps I live by luck, as you do."

"Good!" cried San Juan, thinking he had found a graceful solution of the problem. "Send for a sealed deck, Kitty. We'll play for her."

"We'll not play for her, Joe. I gamble with only what belongs to me. I have no claim on Lottie. I'm simply wishing her well. If we both leave this room alive I'll drop in on you later and see you professionally."

The girl was of no interest to San Juan. He felt an immense relief in believing that the fickle Schemer could never make his heart ache by receiving any attentions from Dinsdale. He amazed the woman by quietly agreeing—

"Let it go at that, Pete."

And he stepped one side.

"You used up all your nerve and your fighting spirit in the cañon, I reckon," hissed Kitty the Schemer, now thoroughly enraged at Dinsdale, the gambler and herself.

San Juan did not mind her angry moods; he rather preferred them. When she was in a rage it was likely she had failed in some attempted conquest. He was not to be trapped into a fight to the death just to please the woman's vanity.

"Dinsdale doesn't believe anything like that," he gravely told her. "He and I went through too much together."

"I know you're game clear through, Joe. I'm not bringing any fight to you," spoke up Dinsdale.

"Really, Kitty, the girl isn't worth two good men throwing down guns on each other. Dinsdale and I are not afraid of each other, but we respect each other. We know just about what the other can do. If we went through with this it would mean one dead man and probably two. Now look the kid over and say what I've said is true. And it's as he says; he saved her, not I."

"He might have let her choose for herself," insisted Kitty the Schemer.

"I want to go with Mr. Dinsdale!" hastily cried Lottie, deeply frightened at the threatened tragedy, and yet not knowing just what it was all about.

"You'd go with me even if you wanted to stay here, Lottie," Dinsdale told her without removing his gaze from the gambler's face.

"You've made a conquest," laughed Kitty the Schemer. "Look out, girl, I may decide to take him from you."

"You can't! You mustn't!" cried the girl as she drew Dinsdale into the hall after her. "Take me away! I'm scared of this place. I'm scared of that woman."

"You little fool," remarked Kitty the Schemer contemptuously as she followed them into the hall.

Her beautiful face was hot with rage as she drew her skirts about her to escape contact with Lottie Carl's coarse clothing and ran up the stairs.

San Juan Joe tried to laugh as he complained:

"—— it, Dinsdale! But you've made bad blood between me and Kitty. Why the —— couldn't you show your cards on the table before I made an ass of myself? Now she won't feel satisfied till you and I fight and one of us gets killed. And if I should be the one to drop she wouldn't be satisfied till she had her collar around your neck. The last is one good reason why you and I won't fight if I can help it.

"But don't change your mind and fall in love with her. Drop in and see me. My place is a short distance above here."

"She's a bad woman!" denounced Lottie Carl.

"Hush, hush! You mustn't say that," Dinsdale corrected, pretending not to see San Juan Joe's twisted smile as he slowly

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mounted the stairs. "She lives her life and you will live yours."

He turned to the door and found it locked. He gave a loud double knock, and the Chinaman soon appeared from a room down the hall.

"Open the door," directed Dinsdale.

"No passee," squealed the servant.

Dinsdale did a trick with his hand and the servant's almond eyes were studying the muzzle of a big handgun.

"Passee like ——!" he stuttered as he produced a key and hurriedly unlocked the door.

"What an awful place!" gasped Lottie Carl as they gained the street and mounted their horses. "What kind of a place is it?"

"It's that kind of a place where nice girls don't go. And we won't say anything more about it," Dinsdale answered. "Now we must buy you some shoes."

THEY rode down the street to a store exhibiting general merchandise. Lottie Carl was soon equipped with a pair of shoes such as she had never owned before. She still carried the bag of gold dust but did not seem to sense its potentials, and her companion paid the bill. The storekeeper told Dinsdale that his original stock, costing three thousand dollars in Cheyenne, had sold for ten thousand dollars as fast as he could unload the wagons. He was very anxious to learn the chances of more freight getting through.

On their way to Mrs. Colt's place Lottie Carl shyly thanked her new friend and said something about his being "mighty good to her." He gruffly repudiated the suggestion.

On entering the boarding-house they were at once in the presence of Mrs. Colt. She was a tall, rangy woman with small, glittering eyes. She scrutinized them keenly while Dinsdale was expressing his desire to procure a room and lodging. When he finished she snapped out—

"Married?"

"Lord, no! Lottie Carl is only a little girl," he cried, quailing beneath her fierce gaze.

"I'm seventeen," protested Lottie Carl.

Dinsdale hurriedly gave her antecedents so far as he knew them and told of her escape from the cañon. The widow's nostrils dilated, and the light of battle shone in her eyes.

"The town's talking about you and that scallywag of a San Juan Joe," she said. "It must have been a gallus fight. I'd a give a dozen ounces to have been along with old Ben."

And she nodded vigorously toward a Sharps rifle in the corner.

"When we come through it happened to be as quiet as a Pennsylvania Sunday-school. I never had a crack at the varmints."

Suddenly her gaze wandered to Lottie Carl's new footgear, and she demanded—

"Where did you git them hussy-like contraptions?"

Again Dinsdale was quick to explain. The widow smiled grimly and conceded:

"Can't blame her as long as you picked them out for her. Who makes good for her keep?"

"I do."

"Why, I have money! Men in the street gave it to me!" excitedly interrupted Lottie Carl, and she held up the buckskin bag.

"She's to keep that, Mrs. Colt. I'll stand the shot. If I get wiped out——"

"Never mind your getting wiped out. It'll be nice if she can keep what she's got; but if you mean you're going to come here a-sparking her——"

"No, no!" obtruded Dinsdale. "You'll be shut of me. I'll pay a month's board ahead now."

"Paper money!" softly cried the widow. "Ain't it handsome! Worth a dollar-five in dust. See here; I'm s'picious of young men willing to pay for the keep of young women with eyes and hair like hers. But I'll take you at face value till you turn out to be no good.

"She'll be much better off for having some work to do. She can help me, and I'll give her her keep. Yes, I'll throw in some wearable clothes and a pair of shoes that'll stand the wear and tear of our streets."

"I knew you were the right sort," meekly said Dinsdale, backing to the door. "I'll be going."

"But ain't I going to see you no more?" cried Lottie Carl, running to him and clutching his arm.

Dinsdale stared helplessly into her thin face, then at the grim visage of the widow. With unexpected humanity Mrs. Colt drew the girl to her side and softly patted the chestnut hair. To Dinsdale she said:

"On Sunday afternoon you can rap. If I'm here you can come as far as this room

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and see your little friend. If I'm out, you'll stay out. Don't come except on Sundays, because I may be out on other days collecting my board money. Sometimes my boys sneak away to card games and I hafter go after them.

"Twice inside of two weeks I've had to drag Freddie Schultz from Keno Frank's place. If they have money to gamble with and to spend on scarlet women they have money to pay the Widder Colt."

"Some of your boarders aren't any better, if as good, as I am," virtuously remarked Dinsdale.

"I ain't got any boarders that's rescued young females from Injuns and bought her finicky shoes. If a man in this house bats a single eyelash at my new help, then God help him! Now I'm busy, and Lottie Carl can pitch in and help me."

Dinsdale shook hands with the girl, who turned away to hide her tears. He was outside the door when she seized his arm and fiercely whispered—

"Don't ever kiss that woman."

Then she was back in the house before he could say a word.

It was a great relief to have the responsibility of the girl shifted to the capable Mrs. Colt. Mounting his horse, he rode down the street as far as the Grand Central Hotel. Hitching his horse outside, he entered and found the place uncomfortably thronged with spectators, merchants and men flush with gold but with no visible means of support. C. H. Wagner, the proprietor, formerly of the Walker House and Saddle Rock restaurant in Salt Lake City, was kept busy overseeing his office staff, and Dinsdale decided, after a few minutes' observation, that the Grand Central was one of the best paying "mines" in the hills.

He peeped into the dining-room and visited the saloon. Not only was the house patronized to capacity by permanent and transient guests, but it also was the meeting-place for speculators, gossip-mongers and that peculiar species of idlers that public houses seem to generate.

"Not the place for me," Dinsdale decided as he returned to his horse. "Too much hurly-burly."

Several female members of "Miller's Grand Combination Troupe," playing that night in the theater across the street, glanced approvingly at Dinsdale's figure as he sat on his horse undecided as to where he should next look for lodgings. Even Lottie Carl would have found his deportment impeccable under the scrutiny of the stage favorites. In truth, he was not aware of their passing.

For a man used to taking life as it came along it was surprizing that Dinsdale should give so much thought to the selection of a boarding-place. Yet there were influences working upon him which made his choice a matter of considerable strategic importance. The I. X. L. Hotel would have secured his patronage if it had not been the headquarters of teamsters, packers and the like. It lacked the variety which Dinsdale demanded. The Grand Central offered variety but was too ostentatious for one who sometime might wish for privacy.

His cogitatons ended with his riding up the street and past Mrs. Colt's house and halting before a sign that pleased his fancy immensely. It read:

BED ROCK HOTELL
PORK & BENES & COMMON DOINS
50 CENTS
CHICKIN FIXINS & FLOUR DOINS
ONE DOLLAR

"Hurrah for 'flour doings,' " he softly applauded.

Entering the Bed Rock, he engaged a room, paying a week in advance from his roll of greenbacks, and was shown up-stairs. The partitions of his room extended only to within two feet of the ceiling, permitting every spoken word to become common property to every other room on the floor. This acoustic drawback might have impelled him to change his mind if the landlord had not informed him that the Grand Central's rooms were suffering from the same defect. Leaving his rifle in the office, he rode his tired horse to Clark's livery stable, paid in greenbacks, and then set out afoot for a more deliberate examination of the town.

In comparing Deadwood with Custer City it was his opinion that the latter was better built and much better situated for expansion, but such advantages could not compete with Deadwood's rich placers. He walked a mile toward Crook City, but tired of the endless ditches and sluice-boxes beside the road. Whenever he paused and listened to men with time for gossip he found there were two topics of general interest—the murder of Wild Bill and the menace of the Sioux.

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"Jack McCall was hired by some of the gamblers!" passionately charged one man. "They was afraid my pard would be put in office to make things decent here. They hired McCall to do for him, then got him clear with their snap 'miners'' meeting, and rushed him out of the hills so he wouldn't blab the truth. I only hope he rides plump into ——, and finds them that hired him all waiting for him."

Some of the group gave ground and glanced uneasily about as if fearing to be identified with the bold speaker.

"That's a poor way to talk, Utter," warned a bow-legged fellow with two guns in his belt. "If the gamblers can work that game—which I don't believe—then they're strong enough to muzzle you."

"All I ask, 'Bandy' Allen, is that they come face on when they try to muzzle me," was the hot reply. "You're pretty thick with some of them; tell them what I'm saying. Wild Bill was put out of the way because the gamblers feared he would clean up the town. Mayor Farnum knows that much. The 'miners'' committee was a farce. I hope McCall rides straight into ——!"

Had "Colorado Charley"—as Utter was generally called—possessed prophetic vision his mind would have been more at rest; for he would have looked down the months, less than a year of them, and seen the murderer riding to expiate his crime on a Yankton scaffold, executed by the United States authorities.

THE next circle of men where Dinsdale loitered were discussing the chances of an Indian invasion, and loudly demanding of each other the reason for the soldiers' failure to come. One citizen announced that the bodies of three whites had been found that very morning up Whitewood Creek. These isolated killings had been so frequent as to become commonplace. The identity of the victims often remained unknown as they were usually buried by the first comers.

Through the open door of the I. X. L. Dinsdale beheld a man gesticulating and talking loudly. Twenty or thirty silent men composed his audience. Dinsdale entered and discovered that the speaker was a stage-driver and was devoting his rough oratory to road-agents.

"An' what do ye think th' houn' says to me after takin' my new pipe, twenty dollars in money an' my new gun? He says I'm to tote along a pair of dust-scales next trip for th' gang to use in divvyin' up th' dust. He says it's too much bother to make th' divvy with a spoon! An' I'll be —— if I'll pay out any of my money for scales, an' th' comp'ny says it would be 'couragin' crime if it furnishes scales."

"Those fellows got the gall of an Indian inspector," cried a clerk who had dodged across the street to get a drink. "Don't know what we're coming to. They'll get one of the treasure-coaches next."

"We're coming to vigilants, same's they did in Montana," spoke up a heavily bearded miner. "Can't make me believe all these dead men found in the gulches was killed by Indians."

Again Dinsdale observed the phenomenon of fear when a man knows but little about his neighbor. There was an uneasy stirring and an exchange of suspicious glances. It was well known that road-agents entered Deadwood City at times to procure supplies. Within a month a fight had started in front of the Grand Central, resulting from a victim recognizing a robber. The robber had escaped in a running fight. That others stayed in town between hold-ups was commonly believed.

The Montana man was impressed by the silence his speech had caused and glared defiantly around for a moment. Then he began to weaken, and to work clear of the group. A jeering laugh accelerated his retreat. Bandy Allen, recently silenced by Colorado Charley, pointed a finger at the miner, now making for the door, and denounced—

"That fool and other fools are talkin' like lunies." He hitched up his belt aggressively and stared stonily at the men.

"Th' agents ain't makin' day wages," he continued. "Th' Injuns are jest as free to sneak through these hills as th' gray wolves be. What we oughter do is to comb th' gulches for reds an' forgit 'bout th' agents till th' really 'portant job is well finished."

"There's hoss sense in that. Injuns first, then the agents, then the hoss-thieves," loudly endorsed one of the audience.

Allen was not pleasing to look at, but the vital need of protection from the Sioux won him many nods of approval. Finding his listeners in sympathy, he hooked his thumbs in his belt and began: "Give me fifty well-

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armed men an' I'll agree to clear out all th' redskins from the Belle Fourche to Red Cañon Crick. Th' job needs men who know th' critters an' ain't afraid of 'em. Here's thousands of folks huddled up like sheep in this gulch, shiverin' an' skeered because small bands of painted Sioux skunks is wipin' out every miner they can catch by hisself."

"Excuse me," broke in a shrill voice, "but the Sioux ain't painting their faces this season. I was their prisoner a bit ago, and I know. They paint the top of their heads, where they part their hair, but not their faces. It's mighty queer."

"Hold yer yap, yer poor fool idiot!" roared Allen, turning to glare malevolently at the speaker.

"Well, 'Scissors' ought to know," quietly interposed a bystander. "He was their prisoner. They took him to be big medicine and let him live, and he saw things."

"I was *wakan witshasha*, mystery man," proudly recited the man called Scissors.

"Any one might get to be *pejihuta witshasha*, a common grass-root man, but I was *wakan*. Before they could cut off my arms I pulled out my little scissors and made a picture of their chief. They thought it was magic.

"It *was* magic. None of you fellers ever see it done before. It's an art. Always could do it. I can go anywhere in these hills and if the Indians see my scissors they won't hurt me. Can't remember when I couldn't do it. See here."

He whipped out a pair of scissors and a piece of paper, and, squinting at Bandy Allen, began cutting the paper with marvelous rapidity. He held the scissors in one position, working the blades, and turning the paper back and forth and in half-circles in a most bewildering manner.

"The Sioux call me Two Knives Talking —each scissors blade is a knife to them, you know," he explained in a singsong voice as he whirled the paper. "They won't hurt me. I can go into any Sioux camp and be welcome. I picked up a lot of their lingo, too. Shouldn't wonder if their next Winter count tells about my capture and living among them."

Dinsdale studied him with much sympathy. He was a slight, washed-out looking specimen, and his face was vacuous. He had all the appearances of one mentally unbalanced. That he was a well-known character in the gulch was evidenced by the rough, yet good-natured badinage, and the men's eagerness to crowd about him and behold the finished "picture."

Allen lowered at him wrathfully, undecided whether to remain as an accommodation to the artist or to withdraw. The men suddenly raised a shout of laughter, and Scissors triumphantly held up the result of his skill. It was an exceedingly clever caricature of Allen with the long, ragged hair and bow legs grotesquely accentuated.

"Give me four bits for it?" asked Scissors, ruffling his thin yellow hair and tentatively offering the picture to Allen.

Roaring an oath, Allen ran his eyes over the grinning faces and dropped a hand on a gun.

"Who's laughin' at me?" he demanded, advancing a few steps.

The smiles vanished. Standing in front of Scissors, he drew back his fist to drive it into the simple face. Dinsdale stepped between the two and informed Allen:

"I was laughing, too. I'm laughing now."

And he grinned broadly.

The men scattered. Allen reached for both guns, but with a flirt of his hand Dinsdale had him covered and was saying—

"Better keep your hands out of mischief."

"What you jumpin' into this game for?" hoarsely asked Allen.

"Because I never like to see a two-gun man going after a chap who's armed only with a pair of scissors."

Allen controlled his rage, for the muzzle of the forty-four was most convincing.

"I wasn't goin' to use a gun on th' fool," he grumbled. "He was makin' game of me, an' he oughter be smashed in the face."

Dinsdale slipped the gun into the holster and informed Allen:

"Have it that I made game of you. Smash me in the face."

Allen stared at him furiously, but instinct warned him to be wary.

"I ain't got any fight with you yet, mister. This feller's a nuisance. I've seen more of him then you have, an' I ain't hurt him any yet. You didn't have no call to bust into this game. I'm a poor forgitter."

With that he turned and swaggered to the door. Dinsdale looked after him thoughtfully for a moment, then laughed lightly.

Scissors felt called upon to vindicate his art, and loudly protested:

"I've made pictures of lots of men in this

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town, bigger men than Bandy Allen. They never got mad. Mr. Philbrick, of the city council, gave me four bits for his. When I was with the Sioux I made one of old One Stab, who married Red Cloud's daughter. He was so pleased he give me a rifle. I sold the rifle here in Deadwood for twenty dollars. Lots of men in San Juan Joe's place buy my pictures. Bandy Allen don't want to get uppish with me, or I'll tell Joe.

"But I'm much obliged to you, stranger. You meant well. Still I don't think Bandy Allen would have hurt me. I'm *wakan witshasha*, you know. White men as well as the Sioux are finding that out. See here. Always could do it."

Again the scissors were at work, nibbling and snipping at a fresh piece of paper, and fashioning something so readily that none could watch the outline grow, so swiftly did the paper turn and twist. This time the eccentric did not betray by his gaze whom he was preserving in outline.

Suddenly he extended the scissors with the picture held between the points. It was of a man with revolver half-raised, a dramatic bit, and a style of portrayal entiely new to Dinsdale.

"Dawg-gone! He cut it from mem'ry! Never even looked at the stranger!" some one cried.

Opening the scissors and allowing the picture to drop into Dinsdale's hand, Scissors shyly said:

"I won't charge you anything for it. You meant well by me."

And with a duck of his head he worked his way through the group and into the street.

"Who is he? What is he?" inquired Dinsdale.

The men were eying him curiously. A miner informed him:

"Scissors is a natural fool in everything outside of cutting paper into pictures and talking polite. He blew into the hills right after Custer was wiped out. He was caught on the way by some of Crazy Horse's bucks. Seeing he was foolish they didn't skin him alive offhand. And when they found out what he could do with scissors and paper they took him to be big medicine. He can cut out buffalo, elk, bear, any animal or bird. He can cut out horses on the dead gallop, or a whole string of men fighting, or anything."

"He must have been educated somewhere before he went foolish," mused Dinsdale. "He talks well. What's his real name?"

"Don't know. He's just Scissors to us, and Two Knives Talking to the Injuns. Well, he's lucky in one way—he don't have to pack any guns in his outfit."

And the miner glanced significantly at Dinsdale's two big Colts.

"I have to pack guns, and I can use two at once," Dinsdale informed him, his face hardening. "Some of you fellows get the same habit and there'll be fewer Injun killings."

"An' fewer stage hold-ups," supplemented a voice from the back of the crowd.

"Why, surely, if you know how to use your guns and have sand enough to take a chance," agreed Dinsdale.

He waited a few moments to see if others wished to indulge in innuendo, and as the men remained silent he returned to the street.

"I'm doing well," he grimly muttered as he aimlessly wandered down the street. "In town only for a few hours and already I've thrown a gun on a Chinaman and a bow-legged scrub—and offered to fight San Juan Joe, although the public doesn't know about that. Reckon I'll drop around and see Joe. I owe him some sport because of the girl. I'll see if I can't put him in a better humor."

TO BE CONTINUED

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THE ASPHALT POOL

by Paul L. Anderson

Author of "The Tyrant Saurian," "The Clear Flame of Courage," etc.

THE lower edge of the setting sun was touching the sea when Machaerodus, the saber-toothed tiger, woke, yawned, stretched, and set out in search of food. Two days before, he had slain a wild horse, had gorged himself, and, dragging the carcass into a thicket, had left it there while he went to sleep off the lethargy that followed his feast.

Now, hungry again, he would go find the prey and would gorge once more; the fact that the meat was not fresh, that in the warm air it had undoubtedly gone putrid—this was nothing to him. He was not fastidious, and hunting was a weariness to be avoided if possible.

In a general way, the great beast that slunk down the hillside suggested the tiger of the present day, though there were certain notable points of difference. He was taller, and heavier of body and of leg, more solidly built throughout; slower moving, less sinuously graceful by far; also, vastly more powerful. His pads were broader and thicker, relatively less long—more adapted to a smashing blow than to clutching and rending, though the long, curved claws could sink deep and grip tight. His hide, instead of being striped or spotted, was tawny on back and sides, shading almost to white under the belly, and his tail was short and thick; but, after all, the most conspicuous difference was in the head.

His forehead was low and flat, arguing a small brain and limited intelligence, and from the upper jaw there projected downward the terrible fangs which gave him his name. These were, in fact, enormously enlarged canines, or eye-teeth, eight inches in length, backward-curving, ivory-white, sharp as needles; they served to grip the prey and also, piercing deep, to kill it.

Altogether, though Machaerodus was slower of wit and less agile of body than his modern prototype, none the less his tremendous strength, incredible tenacity of life, and utter ferocity made him one to be feared.

So Machaerodus took his way down the hillside, feeling in his dim brain a sort of satisfaction, a vague sense of pleasure, for it was not often that he could capture so toothsome a morsel as a wild horse. His heavy body and tonic muscles were not active enough to let him run down so swift a beast; even did he spring on a band from ambush, in all likelihood they could evade his clumsy rushes, could escape his powerful claws. But on this occasion he had been resting, sunning himself on a little ledge of rock, when the band passed beneath.

The muscles tense under his tawny hide, wicked eyes gleaming with blood-lust, lips drawn back in savage grin, he had waited until a fine, plump, full-grown mare was directly below. Then, like a taut spring suddenly released, he had hurled himself through the air, landing squarely on the victim's back. The mare, struck by that ponderous weight dropping a full twenty

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feet, had been smashed to the earth, the great claws plowing deep through skin and flesh into her vitals.

At her shrill scream of agony and fear the rest of the band fled, some dashing forward, the others whirling and going back the way they came. Scream after scream sounded as the mare, frantic, fought to rise, to get free, but the tiger held his place, crushed her down, worked his way along to where he could drive his fangs into her neck. The sword shaped tusks pierced deep, the mare gave one last convulsive struggle, lay still, and Machaerodus feasted richly. And now he would feast again on this rare prey.

The home of Machaerodus was on the slopes to the north and east of where Los Angeles now stands, but then there was no city; indeed, man had not yet appeared on this earth. Some few pithecoid, ape-like beasts there were, that walked on their hinder legs; hairy, heavy of shoulder and low of forehead, long of arm, powerful; these were not true men, and the country was given over to the beasts of prey and to those on which they fed. Beaver, wild boar, deer, bear, wild-cat, musk-ox, horse, weasel, hyena, wolf, saber-toothed tiger; these abounded, and there were others of stranger form. A giant armadillo, its solid carapace some five or six feet long, high-arching, rounded, was also to be found, and, too, there was a giant ground sloth, huger than any modern sloth, four or five feet high at the top of its arched back, and nine or ten feet in length.

This was the commonest food of Machaerodus, for its thick and weighty barrel and short legs precluded swift motion, nor was its heavy, low-carried head suited to fighting. Its skin, though tough and leathery, offered little protection against the tusks of the tiger, nor was it able to evade his attack by climbing; its weight was excessively heavy for its feet.

So when Machaerodus came on one of these great beasts uprooting trees for food or dragging down the low-hung branches to browse on the leaves he was sure of a meal; not even could the sloth have warning of his approach, for neither its dull nostrils nor its little piggy eyes served to give notice of danger.

The armadillo was different. As slow-moving and harmless as the sloth, it wore defensive armor of the finest, and Machaerodus found the meat difficult to extract, wherefore he would pass it by in favor of the larger and more helpless beast. But he wearied of this one kind of food; the skin of the sloth was an annoyance to worry through, nor was the meat especially savory. Consequently he was furious when, coming to the spot where he had left the carcass of the mare, he found only scattered bones, picked clean.

Snarling his futile rage, Machaerodus cast about to find what beast had robbed him; no difficult task, for the scent of wolves lay thick. No hope of a meal was here; if wolves had been about, the country was scoured, the food animals frightened far. Snarling again, Machaerodus betook himself to hunt, to find some beast that would serve to gratify his desire, to still the hunger that gnawed in his stomach.

Down the long slope he padded softly, sniffing the air always for hint of food, through forests of pine and sequoia, their sheltered aisles barren of underbrush; leaving these, through thick jungles of smaller trees and bushes; now and again crossing some mountain stream that ran ice-cold from the heights, roaring and foaming in recurrent waterfalls; ever questing, ever alert, on and on went Machaerodus the saber-toothed. Where possible he leaped the brooks, for he owned all of a cat's dislike for water; once, however, a treacherous bit of ground caved under his mighty spring and he splashed full into a little pool.

Spitting furiously—he was ever short of temper; now, being hungry, doubly so—he scrambled out, shook himself, rolled on the ground, and resumed his hunt. Coming out into a little open space, he blinked and shrank back, for the blaze of the setting sun struck squarely into his eyes. A slight volcanic haze from some far-distant eruption hung in the air, and the half-disc of the sun glowed red, laying a pathway of ruddy light across the ocean.

Machaerodus recovered himself and slid into the brush on the farther side of the opening, seeking always the gloom of the darkening forest. He was vaguely conscious of a slight chill in the air, a cool wind that drew down from the vast glaciers far to the north, from the spreading, implacable ice-sheets, silent, inexorable as eternity, thousands upon thousands of miles in extent, that covered half the continent.

Machaerodus, however, knew nothing of these glaciers; he had never strayed much

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from where he was born, and his sluggish brain held no knowledge of them; he merely knew that the evening breeze was cool and that he was hungry.

WITH softness uncanny in so huge a beast, he crept through the forest, his broad paws padding lightly over the earth and leaf-mold. Once a hare, startled in her form, leaped up before him—too late! Even as she leaped, a great paw flashed; long, curving talons caught in her fur; powerful jaws crunched twice, three times; a gulp—and the hare was gone. A few spots of blood on the leaves marked the tragedy, and Machaerodus, licking his lips, went on. A hare was something, to be sure, but by no means enough to satisfy such hunger as raged within him.

By now the sun had set; a faint tinge of red and gold and purple still hung in the western sky, but that was fading fast, and the stars showed thick in the blue above, peeping through chance openings in the foliage. The character of the forest was changing as Machaerodus passed to the lowlands; pine and sequoia had given place to oak and maple, and alder thickets were found beside the streams.

Machaerodus was making for a spot he knew, where a colony of beaver had their home; they would not have been frightened away by the wolves, at all events, for they could take refuge in the water. Further, night was their time for working, and he might be able to slip up within pouncing distance.

And the flesh of beaver was good eating; feeding on bark and young shoots, they owned a flavor as rich as that of the horse that had been stolen from him. Yes, the beaver swamp was a good place to hunt, and he made his way directly thither, swift yet silent.

One of the mountain streams, spreading out over the flats, had formed a pool some hundred yards in length and a quarter that in width. Choosing a spot where it narrowed again to flow between high banks, the beaver had built a dam of sticks and saplings cunningly interlaced and plastered with mud. This dam had deepened the water by several feet, backing it up till the pond was over a quarter of a mile in length and two hundred yards or more across at the widest part.

A great house of sticks and mud showed above the surface, and from the margin of the pond radiated a dozen or more canals, dug by the beaver that they might float down logs to be stored for winter food. Near the water's edge stumps of felled trees projected above the pond, together with a few saplings, as yet uncut. As Machaerodus approached he could hear sounds of the beaver working; occasional splashes, crash of falling trees, rippling of the water as logs were pushed to the storehouse.

Carefully, with infinite caution, the tiger drew near, and presently could make out the form of a giant beaver, sitting upright and propped on his broad, flat tail, who gnawed busily at the trunk of a tree to fell it. Slowly, slowly, Machaerodus crept closer, gathered himself for the leap. The beaver, intent on his work, showed no sign of fear, no suspicion of an enemy at hand. Fur bristling, green eyes gleaming savagely, short tail twitching, the tiger set himself, grew tense, sprang!

Whether warned by scent or by some faint infinitesimal noise, the beaver whirled, dashed for the water, plunged in, dived. And as he dived the flat of his tail struck the surface of the pond with a smack that warned the others, that sounded for a mile through the forest. Quivering, snarling ferociously, lips drawn back from gleaming teeth, ears flattened against his skull, a very picture of fury, Machaerodus stood, his fore-paws clutching the earth where but a moment before the beaver had rested.

In rage he clawed and tore the ground, thrashed against the bushes; sank presently into quiet. Withdrawing into the brush, he lay down to wait the return of the beaver. For an hour or more he waited, motionless as some fallen log, till at length the water parted and a streaming, glistening head was thrust above the surface. Machaerodus lay moveless, waiting, but under his hide the muscles tensed, grew ready. As silently as it had appeared, the head sank once more; and after a further wait Machaerodus lifted himself to his feet and wafted off into the forest like a moving shadow.

Down he went, and down, climbing low hills to slink down the farther slope, drawing even nearer and nearer to the sea. The underbrush grew thicker and thicker, massing together in jungle fashion, and the forest took on a different aspect with the increase in number of bamboos, which did not grow upon the higher slopes. Far in the distance sounded a crashing as of trees breaking, of

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stout limbs being torn from their trunks, and Machaerodus turned in that direction. Nearer came the sound and nearer, and presently there rose above the crashing and stamping a thunderous, bellowing trumpet-call, whereat Machaerodus shrank back into the brush and lay still, utterly without motion.

On and on came the uproar, till there pushed into view a herd of mammoth, huger than any elephant, with shaggy bodies and long, curiously twisted tusks. A score in number, led by a great bull, they came, flattening the grass, uprooting small trees to reach the tender branches, tearing down limbs, feeding luxuriously on the delicate growths, and leaving behind them a swath full twenty yards across, a trampled lane through the forest. Green eyes alight, torn between lust and fear, the tiger hid himself, his tawny color mingling with the shadows.

Once had he feasted on a mammoth, when one of the great beasts had been caught by a falling tree; its back broken, it had attracted sundry beasts of prey by its squeals and screams of pain, and Machaerodus, driving away a band of hyenas, had waited until death set free the giant brute and rendered it harmless. Then had he gorged himself, nor had he ever forgotten the savor of the flesh; the trunk was an especially delicate morsel, and at the memory he slavered now, lusting for such another feast. But he dared not attack. Powerful as he was, yet was he no match for those Titans of the forest.

One swing of a snaky trunk, swifter than lightning, a few ponderous stamps of those columnar legs, and Machaerodus would be no more than a crushed and shapeless mass of blood and bones and flesh, driven into the ground. His mate had died thus, some months before, and he remembered yet the manner of her going. No, he had not fought for her; the instinct of self-preservation had held him aloof, nor would any but a she-tiger with cubs have flown into that peril. It was this fancied danger that had betrayed the mother to her fate.

Wrongly thinking the mammoths were about to trample her kittens, she had dashed at the leading bull, had sprung to his forehead, and clung there, gouging and biting and clawing and snarling, an incarnate devil of fury, till the bull, thundering with pain, had lashed out his trunk, seized her about the middle, and torn her loose. Even then she fought, writhing and twisting madly, but the mammoth, lifting her high, hurled her with all his force against the earth.

As if from the clouds she fell, rebounded, lay still; and the mammoth, rearing on his hind legs, poised above her, crashed down, earth-shaking — again — again — and she was—nothing. Machaerodus had never known what became of the kittens; the paternal instinct was totally lacking in him; it simply did not exist, and he gave them no further attention, but left them to shift for themselves. But the recollection of the fright he had then received—that remained with him, and now kept him silent and unmoving as a rock while the mammoths passed.

When the noise of their passage had faded to a vague murmur in the distance Machaerodus got to his feet and took up the hunt once more.

By now the moon had risen, and was casting strange shadows athwart the forest floor, velvety, shifting, waving shadows, that blended with the tiger's movements and helped conceal him, helped make him seem a part of the grass and brush. A mile or more from where he had lain to watch the mammoths, his nose warned him that food was near.

Slowly, slowly, with infinite patience, with infinite lack of haste, an inch at a time, he drifted forward, coming at last to where a partridge slept, crouched amid the grass. Cautiously, cautiously, Machaerodus crept nearer, flashed out one giant paw, and the partridge died in its sleep. No time for even one silly flutter, no time for even a squawk—the bird never even knew that peril was near! Promptly, feathers and bones and all, it went to join the hare, and Machaerodus passed on.

On and on, ever toward the sea he went. Once he startled a herd of deer, that got to their feet and swept off into the darkness before he could gather his muscles for a spring. Once he hid in the bushes while a herd of wild boar went by, rooting and grunting; he had no desire to meet those matchless fighters, to encounter those rending tusks.

Once a weasel, a beast that hid within its tiny body a heart even more savage and ferocious than that of Machaerodus himself, bounded undulating across his path and vanished into the bushes, its sinuous form no more than a flash in the moonlight as it sped. Machaerodus would not have

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disdained even so trifling a morsel, but its motions, lightning-swift, were almost too fast for him to see, let alone arrest, and the weasel went unscathed, to carry death to some sleeping bird or beast.

So through the long night Machaerodus hunted, finding at times a mouthful, but still unsatisfied, till when morning came he was far from his lair. But with the coming of day there came a change in his fortunes, a change sudden, terrible, unexpected.

THE moon was low in the western sky and the stars had paled to the dawn when Machaerodus reached the edge of the forest. The eastern sky showed a rosy glow near the horizon, and the blue of the vault overhead had lightened to a turquoise hue; objects could be seen at a distance, though under the trees the black shadows still lingered, dense, heavy, impenetrable to any eyes save those of such night-dwellers as the great tiger.

Beyond the forest edge there spread an open plain of some acres' extent, the surface a dull brownish color; bare of trees and brush it lay, not even a blade of grass growing anywhere within its borders. Little humps and mounds were to be seen here and there, scattered irregularly over the flat area, and in the dim light these mounds appeared to lift and fall, to heave and move, contract and spread again, with a strangely rhythmic motion. Occasionally one of the mounds would change color, growing blacker, and a black stain would spread for some distance over the surrounding plain. A fetid odor hung over the whole flat, drifting into the near-by forest, heavy and sickening.

Thick, oily bubbles rose at times from the black spots, iridescent, glistening; bubbles as small as an acorn or large as the head of a mammoth; slowly, languidly they rose, as though pushing their way with difficulty through a viscous mass; bursting slowly, falling back gradually to the level of the flat.

It was a lake of asphalt, formed by the bubbling up of springs of petroleum from the earth's depths; the black spots were the petroleum fountains, the brownish surface the crust formed by the induration of the heavy oil on reaching the air. The crust was several inches in thickness, and strong enough to bear up even so ponderous a beast as Machaerodus, save only in the neighborhood of the mounds that marked the springs beneath. Machaerodus glanced over the plain, seeing no food thereon, and turned again toward the forest.

Instantly alert, he froze rigid, his attention caught by three forms a few hundred yards away. Looking fixedly, he made out that these were three of the giant sloths, browsing on the foliage, and he set himself to creep toward them, ever cautious, silent.

Of a sudden he stopped in his tracks, eyes shining, ears flattened back against his head, lips drawn back in anger—a faint sound had come to him from the distance. Again it rang, and again, and Machaerodus quivered with rage, for it was the long-drawn howl of a wolf. Well he knew himself powerless against a wolf-pack; two or three he might master, but if there were a score he dared not face them.

Savage, remorseless, swift of foot and sharp of fang, utterly fearless, never giving over the battle while life breathed within them, the wolves were the most dangerous of all the jungle creatures, when in number; singly, or in pairs, they would not attack a tiger. Machaerodus listened, trying to make out how many of the wolves there might be, and presently went on, satisfied there were no more than two, by the sound.

Being to the south, they were down-wind from the sloths, and were coming up on the scent, hot-foot. Machaerodus, on the other hand, was to the north, hunting—in this case—by sight alone, and as soon as he felt certain that there were but two of the wolves he bounded forward toward the sloths, that he might be the first to reach them. The sloths fed on calmly, unconscious of danger, until with savage rush the great tiger was upon them, springing from the thicket wherein he had so craftily hidden while approaching.

Then, terrified, the sloths turned to flee, but their short legs and clumsy bodies moved but slowly compared to the swift death so close at hand. Cutting them off from the forest, Machaerodus dashed forward, struck down the hindmost, drove his long tusks through skin and flesh, hung on despite the frantic struggles of the victim, bit deep, and tore. His strong jaws closed over the sloth's spine, there followed one last tremor, and the sloth, toppling over, lay still.

Machaerodus poised crouching on the body of his prey, glared about, tail twitching, even as the wolves appeared from the forest.

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At sight of him they halted, watched from a distance, not daring to come nigh.

The two remaining sloths, meanwhile, had fled in panic terror across the plain of crusted asphalt, and Machaerodus, looking around, caught view of them. His lust aroused by the sight of these possible victims in flight, he hesitated a moment, then abandoned the one he had slain—even should the wolves try to feast on that he could easily drive them away on his return—and set out in pursuit of the two that fled.

In great leaps he crossed the asphalt, that heaved beneath him with irregular, sickening sway, like thin ice. On and on, drawing ever closer to his prey, the sloths ambling awkward and ungainly in and out among the mounds that marked the fountains below. On and on, nearer and nearer, green eyes shining, cruel teeth bared, ears lying flat, huge muscles rippling under the smooth hide, dashed Machaerodus the saber-toothed, while the sloths, terror-stricken, squealed their fright most piteously.

And now he was within striking distance, and gathered himself for the final leap. Suddenly, without warning, the crust under the nearer sloth quivered violently, cracked, broke apart in radiating lines, and the giant beast plunged staggering down. It did not sink completely; the heavy, viscid mass below supported it to some extent, but it was trapped; its feet were caught, and it could not draw them out. Swiftly the cracks spread, the crust beneath the other sloth gave, and that also, breaking through, was caught. Machaerodus, instinctively conscious of danger, seeing something which he could not understand, stopped short, uncertain whether to flee or to go on.

On the one hand, an unknown peril; on the other, food. Fear bade him seek safety; hunger impelled him forward. Which to obey? But while he hesitated the decision was taken from him; the spreading cracks reached to where he stood, the crust gave under him, heaving up around like blocks of ice, and he also was plunged into the sticky mass.

Frantically he fought to clear himself, frantically he clawed and bit and tore, furiously he snarled and thrashed about—but to no purpose. The adhesive asphalt held him tight; did he lift one paw, the others sank deeper; the more he struggled, the more his feet embedded themselves; as he lifted and shook his paws, the asphalt followed, stringing out, to grip once more as the paws were lowered.

Deeper and deeper he sank, fighting, screaming, plunging, clawing; he who had so often carried terror to other creatures was now himself in the grasp of a fear more desperate than any they had known. Fiercely he strove to go forward, to reach the sloths, who, struggling likewise, were likewise sinking deeper all the while. Now one of them, drawn down, lost its balance and fell on its side; soon the other fell, and, their limbs hampered by the gummy fluid, the great beasts could no longer struggle; an occasional convulsive movement was all.

And Machaerodus also found himself losing in the fight. Desperately he strove to reach firm footing, but the black and sticky asphalt dragged at his limbs, pulled them down, kept him from fighting; savagely he bit at it, accomplishing nothing; it filled his mouth, plastered itself over his face, drew him down. Horrible odors rose from the depths, sickening, suffocating; Machaerodus thrashed wildly, plunged more frantically—and still the asphalt gripped tight, drew him lower and lower. And now he could no longer lift his paws from the frightful mass, could no longer struggle; up to his belly in the sticky stuff, he could but wrench and twist wildly; lower he went and lower, till his body was engulfed. The sloths had completely disappeared.

And now only the tiger's head still showed, its savage eyes gleaming with rage and fear, black asphalt streaking it all about, the great tusks that had slain so many foes powerless against this dread, this unknown enemy. Higher and higher, up to the middle of the head, hiding the blazing eyes, crept the asphalt, heaving from the twisting of the mighty muscles over which it triumphed; the ears were hidden, the eyes covered; remained only the black nostrils and white tusks.

One final effort, one last desperate wrench, despairing; futile, and these also disappeared. Sluggishly, sullenly, the asphalt closed over that great form, and as it did so there rose a huge bubble, oily, shining, opalescent, spread over with shifting films of rainbow colors, glistening in the low rays of the morning sun; for a moment it rested on the surface of the pool, then slowly burst, sank back to level, and all was still.

On the margin of the plain, the wolves feasted on the body of the giant sloth.

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JOHN BLANKET'S LEAD DOG

by T. von Ziekursch

JOHN BLANKET was a most unusual master. Tuque did not know that, although he found it out later. But in the heart of the big husky pup a warmth of love welled up in such proportions that it overshot all proper bounds and made it more difficult for John Blanket to break him to the traces than would have ordinarily been the case. That was because there was depth of genuine understanding concealed behind the impassive, wrinkled features of the old Indian.

To lash or wield the butt of the heavy whip was permissible in John Blanket's creed when the dog was just plain stubborn, and rarely then. But that was the only time, for viciousness always had an underlying cause, and John Blanket invariably raised his own dogs, thus eliminating the brutal things in their early life and training that make the Northern sled dog a thing to be feared.

Truly Tuque was a marvelous dog. At one year, weighing seventy-five pounds, and without the full thickness of maturity, he was advanced to the lead job. Being lead dog on John Blanket's team was a signal honor. Tuque did not know that either, but there were others who did and who would have parted with heavy sacks of dust for a dog which did not need much wasting of breath on the inveterate "moosh, hy-ooh, moosh" when the drifts were deep.

Being lead dog on John Blanket's team was more than an honor. It was the highest caste to which a dog might attain. It meant the privilege of standing beside John Blanket as a sort of overseer and sentry when the frozen caribou meat or whitefish was given out, and the permission to curl up beside him while the evil-smelling pipe mingled its odors with the fragrance of the crisp, spruce-laden air at night when the fire burned bright before the sleeping bag was brought forth. It meant also a place in tradition, for the lead dogs of John Blanket's teams became famous over the more than forty years during which he ran mail up the river and through the wilderness, twice each twelvemonth with never a failure.

John Blanket left the post at Rouge Rampart each September and March with his big sled, the sacks of mail and his provisions. From there the path led north along the river, three hundred miles of turning, twisting trail through the lumber belt to the ice-fringed shores below where the Circle crosses the bay.

A rest there to put the dogs back into condition and the way pointed westward into the heart of the trapping region where an isolated little post waited, two hundred and fifty miles away. From there the homeward leg of the triangle was four hundred miles.

Now John Blanket strode along, oblivious of the crunch of his snow-shoes on the feathery surface, hearkening not to the creaking of the sled or the whistling of the wind that swept down across the bay as he neared the first station of his journey. He

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was lost in admiration of Tuque, who swayed from side to side like a pacing horse as he leaned against the traces, head held high, picking the best traveling with unerring eyes, and thus saving John Blanket the arduous task of breaking trail. Truly he was a marvelous dog, and the bronze face of the old Indian lighted with pride.

One day out from the station another sled came from the westward, and Pierre La Roche wielded the lash unsparingly, for he was in a hurry to get back to his trap lines and the liquor he had left behind while he went for provisions.

John Blanket's sled held the post of honor in front and made trail, while La Roche forced his malemiuts to hold the pace; and all that day his eyes rarely left the smoothly gliding form of Tuque.

The next day, as John Blanket fed his team while Tuque stood guard at his side, La Roche approached and watched, his small eyes alight with envy. At last he removed the pipe from his mouth and inclined his head toward Tuque.

"—— fine dog," he said.

John Blanket nodded assent.

"—— fine dog," he grunted.

La Roche put the pipe back in his mouth and puffed silently a few moments.

"You sell um?" he asked finally.

There was scorn on John Blanket's lips.

"No sell um," he spoke disdainfully.

La Roche scowled and continued to puff at his pipe. Then he spoke again.

"You trade um?"

"No trade um," repeated John Blanket after him, and turned back to the cabin at the station with Tuque at his heels.

The next morning John Blanket arose and consternation came to his heart, while far in the depths of the forest La Roche sped along, forcing the utmost from his team. On the sled which they hauled a low snarl occasionally emanated from a bag that was lashed securely down with Tuque inside of it.

But the joy of his theft was short lived for La Roche. The dog he had envied John Blanket the possession of was a different dog entirely than the snarling, snapping brute that strained at the end of the chain outside the cabin, and came up red eyed with every giant fang bared to leap vainly for his throat after each terrific smash with the butt of the whip.

That was the method Pierre La Roche employed to prove his mastery. Sometimes it took two beatings, sometimes more before they subsided into cringing subservience, and the whip they respected; therefore he always carried it.

But this time it was different. Each morning Tuque fought on at the end of that chain, blindly struggling to reach the throat beneath the leering face of the man until weakness ended the efforts. At last the half-breed Indian woman who was the mother of La Roche's tiny girl intervened despite the oaths that greeted her forwardness, and Tuque had peace.

Then, one day when La Roche had departed for the round of his trap lines, a little figure, smiling and bright faced beneath its furs, toddled from the cabin and let out a cry of delight.

Tuque drew back to the end of his chain, and his lips lifted slightly at this new threat which came toward him with both baby arms outstretched. There was a rumbling sound in his chest. His head was still sore and lumpy from the butt of the whip, but the little face felt smooth and soft against it while the chubby hands pressed his gaunt muzzle against the tiny throat.

A joyous squeal came from the child as the giant husky rose to all fours, almost knocking it sprawling into the snow. And the half-breed Indian woman inside the cabin heard that squeal. She came out, not in time to see the bushy tail wag timidly but only to catch a glimpse of the white fangs as the tongue was withdrawn after licking across the face of the child.

Tuque and the baby fell apart as she screamed and swooped down to gather up her offspring and rush into the cabin. Then she reappeared and cautiously approached. A moment later Tuque found the chain loosened and freedom was his at last.

A SHORT while he stood in doubt. About the clearing the forest grew close. Beneath the spruce and fir the gloomy depths offered refuge. Tuque turned to look at the cabin. Behind the slightly opened door the half-breed woman stood, shielding her child and holding a huge whip, such as La Roche always carried. Tuque's lips wreathed back, then he turned and trotted off into the forest.

He was hungry and weakened, but that night he hunted. Silently he padded along over the snow through the forest aisles, but

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no quarry offered. When morning came he dug into the snow and slept, and came out again at the approach of dusk to resume his quest. Finally his nose found the slots of a woodland caribou, and the first beams of the Winter moon saw a dark shape flash out of a thicket in a leap that ended at the throat of the forest nomad. Then Tuque drank deeply of the blood and felt the old fire return in his veins.

That night as he hovered near the kill his ears caught the quavering cry of the pack in the distance. His ruff stood out and the bristles along his spine stiffened. The deep rumbling in his chest was his battle challenge, for Tuque was John Blanket's lead dog and he hated the wolves even as did John Blanket.

There could be no doubt of it, the old Indian hated them, for Tuque had stood by his side in front of where the rest of the team cowered on two occasions while he fired with deadly effect as the gray, wraith-like forms sped past in their circle.

Tuque did not fear them—he feared nothing. Those great jaws could drive the powerful fangs through the thickest fur wolf ever wore just as easily as they could have torn out the throat or ripped the arm off Pierre La Roche.

The cry of the pack throbbed closer; perhaps they smelled the caribou. Tuque crouched and waited. Silence followed; then it sounded again, and suddenly burst forth in a wild volume of sound as they breasted a ridge and swept down to the meat, twenty of them, running close, for their noses told them the feast awaited without the formality of a chase.

For the actual meat Tuque had no real interest. He had gorged earlier, and sufficient for the day was the food thereof—but it was his, he had killed it.

The great leader, running in front of the pack, was almost on the carcass of the caribou when a darker form appeared from the protection of some scrub fir. It glided with almost inconceivable speed over the snow in a crouching position.

There was a ghastly snarling yelp, and the huge wolf whirled through the air, a complete circle backward, with spine broken while Tuque loped away into the depths. The pack soon gave up the chase to return to the caribou with the tidbit of their former leader thrown in.

Havoc was wrought among the wolves of the Keewatin bottoms that Winter. The shaggy, dark-haired dog took heavy toll of their ranks, sought them out in their retreats where they rested in lonely seclusion when the pack was not gathered for the hunt; attacked them relentlessly and even took to harassing the pack when they swept along in full cry on the blood trail.

Twice Pierre La Roche, on the round of his trap lines, saw him and cursed volubly. Several times he found his traps robbed and knew the answer, for John Blanket carefully taught his teams the intricacies of a trap, knowing well that they would try to steal the bait anyhow. Once La Roche got a shot at him but missed and pulled the flap of the sleeping bag close that night for protection.

Thereafter La Roche knew that death stalked on his trail, and at night he chained the dogs near by for the warning they would give at the approach of a stranger of their own kind. He also divided his trap lines into four sections, thus eliminating the long swing around the entire route and enabling him to return to the cabin more frequently at night.

If Tuque reverted to the wild it was a lonely reversion, for time did not seem to lessen his hatred of the wild forest runners he so much resembled except in the darkness of his coat. Male and female alike he killed them at every opportunity, for, truly, he was a wonderful dog, and what John Blanket had killed he also killed.

At last the Chinook breezes began to send their message softly through the forest, challenging the supreme sway of Winter. But a few more weeks and the trees would clothe in a new verdure, though the gusting blasts continued to pile the drifts deep.

Down at Rouge Rampart John Blanket established a precedent. He spent much time getting his team into condition early and departed with the mail a week ahead of usual for the first time in forty years.

Arrived at the station on the bay he asked of the health and whereabouts of Pierre La Roche. Then he left there, also a week ahead of schedule. But, for the first time in two generations, he deviated from the shortest way to the tiny, isolated post in the trapping belt.

All had not gone well thus far, for the loss of Tuque had forced him to use an inferior dog in the post of honor at the lead of the team. And in the traces there were

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three others, recently added and not accustomed to John Blanket's ways. Only old Beme, sledge dog for almost a decade, kept things going as well as they had been; and John Blanket was worn and tired from the constant breaking of trail for this team.

A hundred miles or more from the station on the bay the cabin of Pierre La Roche nestled like a tiny dot hidden in the forest. Thither John Blanket headed, his instinct guiding him unerringly in the direction given him at the station.

La Roche had been absent now a week, making the entire round of his trap lines to take them up, for the time of good furs was past. John Blanket did not know that as he approached the clearing, but the half-breed Indian woman knew it, and wished for his return.

The day after he left she was seized with a fever, and it grew steadily worse until her fear began to materialize into something very definite. Then came terror—for her child as much as for herself. The pestilence of the North, the thing the old French termed Le Mort Rouge and which the English doctors of the fur companies call epidemic smallpox, was sweeping through the wilderness as it does on occasions with no apparent explanation.

At last she was sure, and before weakness overcame her she attached a bit of red flannel to the end of a pole and lashed it to the cabin—the universal warning of the dread death throughout the broad domain of the North.

Tuque also knew of the absence of La Roche. Each night of that absence he had sat in the snow just beyond the trapper's fire, his luminous eyes gleaming malevolently at the sleeping bag in which was the man, and he was held back only by the fact that the rifle was also in that bag.

An hour before John Blanket reached the clearing Pierre La Roche came, glad that it meant the end of the nerve tension which made him cast his eyes backward over the trail so often, ever expecting to see that dark form slinking through the thickets. He reached the edge of the clearing and a gasp escaped him.

"*Sacré Dieu!*" he murmured, aghast at sight of the tiny bit of red that met his gaze.

He dropped the rifle in the snow and started on a run for the cabin, but halted abruptly. Perhaps he was too late, and it would only be courting death. He hesitated—it would be useless to endanger his life. The child—it also probably had it. Pierre La Roche turned with lowered head and strode back toward where his team waited within the edge of the forest. Better to face anything than this mysterious terror which could not be seen.

His dogs were snarling, and Pierre La Roche looked up. Then fear gripped him anew. Out of the depths, over his rifle, the dark form of a giant husky stepped, half crouching as it began to advance. The trapper whipped the huge knife from its sheath and bent forward, his left arm half raised in front of his throat, like a boxer on the defense.

Slowly they advanced toward each other. Then the dog leaped. The knife glanced from one of his ribs, slashing his side, but the man went down and screamed as he died with throat agape.

In the forest John Blanket heard the deep, rumbling roar as Tuque threw back his head and hurled his victory cry into the reaches. The old Indian hastened on—it was the cry of his most beloved, just as he had heard it before when the rest of the team acknowledged their chief.

THERE was the clearing and the cabin of La Roche. Here also would be Tuque. John Blanket examined the magazine of his rifle. The man who had stolen Tuque must be here too. The old Indian's face was impassive

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as he advanced. Suddenly he stopped, his eyes wide and staring.

A bit of red sagged from a pole at the corner of the cabin, and John Blanket felt something akin to fear grip him. As he looked a strange thing happened. The door gave inward and the tiny form of a child, swathed in furs, appeared, wailing disconsolately.

John Blanket hesitated but a moment, during which his impulses fought with terror, and the former won.

"Hy-ooh, moosh, moosh," he howled, and the whip lashed on the backs of his team until the sled stopped in the middle of the clearing.

Then he advanced to the cabin and entered.

Soon he emerged, the child led by one hand, and a curling wisp of flame licked around the edge of the doorway up the side of the cabin and caught on the dry, overhanging roof.

John Blanket drew back the moosehide envelope on the sled and deposited the child, still crying.

"Hy-ooh! Hu, moosh, moosh," he called and the dogs leaned forward in the traces, but John Blanket stopped again and the rifle came up into a position of readiness.

Out of the depths a great, dark form leaped, heralded by a shrill cry that was part howl, part bark and part whimper. A half dozen long leaps and it was on the old Indian, almost bowling him over into the snow, licking his face and emitting wild sounds.

John Blanket looked carefully around, then, while the swirling pyramids of flame from the burning cabin of death cast their glow into the forest, the mask of indifference fell from the wrinkled bronze face and John Blanket dropped to one knee in the snow. His arms encircled the neck of Tuque and pressed him close despite his struggles.

As he arose Tuque's legs stiffened and the hair along his spine came up, while his great teeth showed ominously as he turned to face the lead dog of the team. The other also bristled to meet this challenger of his supremacy, but John Blanket intervened before they could settle it in the primeval fashion.

The lead dog was relieved from his post of honor and doubled up farther back in the traces where he could not reach the thighs of Tuque. The Indian pulled playfully at the heavy ruff as he slipped the harness on Tuque, and the dog rubbed his great head affectionately on the high larigans of the old mail runner.

"Hy—" began John Blanket, but they were off before he could finish, Tuque leaning forward eagerly into the straps, swaying from side to side like some lithe pacing horse.

This was as it should be. John Blanket's throat would no more tire with the ceaseless urging and he could run behind the sled instead of being forced to break trail constantly. In his joy he forgot the terror of the pestilence he had faced so rashly at Pierre La Roche's cabin, forgot it as much as he could with the child on the sled as a constant reminder.

That night he released the team with many misgivings. He knew that he was racing with the terror of the North, headed for the second stop of his triangular route in a wild flight against the time when Le Mort Rouge should manifest itself in the child and possibly in himself.

A hundred and fifty miles of snow trail, and at the end—the white man's medical missionary who had replaced the shaaman or medicine priest of the red man, and who really drove out the devils with things that came in bottles instead of with howled incantations. With Tuque he felt confident of making it—perhaps it would be better to kill the displaced lead dog than to risk his maiming Tuque in battle. John Blanket never even admitted a thought that Tuque might be defeated and killed. No, it was only that he might be so injured before he conquered that his speed and strength would be marred.

The Indian looked at the child where it cried softly on the fur robe he had spread for it near the fire. He did not want to face the slow death in the forest himself—but he was old and the long trail with his fathers could not be far off. There was the child and the mail, however. Forty Winters had passed and the great men down in Ottawa knew he never failed, though the blizzards were bad, though the pestilence stalked through the wilderness, though he starved on the way and the dogs died in the traces.

John Blanket's reverie was a long one, and he failed to see the creeping advance of the lead dog that had been ousted. Just outside the circle of the fire's glow Tuque waited. At last the Indian reached for his rifle. It had to be done. He could take no

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chances. Surely Tuque would win, but nothing could be risked that might retard the speed he must make while death hovered near.

He remembered the dead woman in the cabin and a cold chill of fear swept over him. He comforted the child with a rough caress, and whirled about at the wild snarl that came from the semi-darkness.

Two great forms crashed together, threw up the snow and had separated only to close again before John Blanket could raise the rifle. One yelped and snarled while the other fought silently. The Indian leaped toward them to finish the battle, but before he could be sure enough to fire one of them hurtled over backward and lay writhing in the snow with throat ripped out. Then Tuque howled his triumph to the stars.

After a while John Blanket crawled into his sleeping bag with the child and made a prayer chant to the ice spirits until the child slept.

At dawn they were off, and all through the short day Tuque sped on, accustoming the team to his faster pace. Another day passed and the child had ceased its whimpering. Two more days and John Blanket began to hope.

That night a white flake drifted down within the circle of firelight. The Indian sat in moody contemplation as others fell, and the wind that had died down now whipped up afresh, driving the increasing curtain of feathery particles ahead of it, while the dogs dug into the snow and curled up with bushy tails covering nose and forepaws.

When morning came it was still snowing, and John Blanket debated whether to resume the trail. The child cried softly and fear clutched at the Indian's heart. He led forth the dogs and slipped the harness on, then silently headed into the storm, beating his hands to bring warmth. The traveling became worse and the dogs floundered up to their bellies, struggling on as the great beast in front kept them up by constantly dragging the traces taut.

That night the child was restless in the sleeping bag and its little body was like a living coal. Several times its turnings awoke John Blanket, but he made his prayer chants and went back to sleep, for he was a fatalist like all of his kind.

The snow had ceased when they started again, but the drifts were piled high and the traveling was bad. The child's fever mounted and it cried now almost constantly.

The dogs soon tired and John Blanket broke precedent. The long whip curled out on all excepting old Beme in the rear and Tuque out in front. This was new punishment and they became rebellious. One of them, directly in back of the lead, lay down in spite of the whip. In a flash Tuque had turned. His fangs nipped deep and the recalcitrant was up and pulling again, thoroughly cowed.

Over the fire that night John Blanket boiled frozen meat and gave the child broth. He looked close at the tiny face. Was that a red rash? The firelight played tricks and he was not sure, but the forehead was very hot and dry. John blanket did not sleep in the bag with the child. Instead he heaped broken sticks high on the blaze and curled in a robe near by, Tuque at his back for added warmth.

When the first gray light filtered through the woods John Blanket bent close over the sleeping bag and drew down the flap. Then his heart sank. Le Mort Rouge had the baby in its clutch. The little eyes scarcely opened and a plaintive cry greeted the admission of the light.

John Blanket straightened and looked toward the sky. His lips moved and a low, droning sound came from them as he paid homage to the gods of his fathers. Then he stooped and gently picked up the bag in his arms, depositing it on the sled.

HIS head was bent as the long struggle began anew. At times he leaned his weight full on the pole of the sled, helping when it would save the strength of the team. In front, Tuque's head sank lower and he swayed wider in his loping trot to broaden the trail for the others. John Blanket's heart was soft toward this dog which had come back to him, and the bond between them strengthened.

Two, maybe three more days, if the team held out, and they would be at the post; but with the exception of the old sledge dog in the rear and Tuque these were not the kind of dogs John Blanket had been accustomed to. The three new ones in the traces weakened fast; and John Blanket traveled light when he started out this time for reasons that were obvious with the extra trip to Pierre La Roche's cabin to make, and the necessity for maintaining the mail schedule.

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Therefore the sled held no extra meat for the dogs to compensate for the drain on their strength occasioned by the added length of the trail and the battle with the drifts.

Toward dusk that day John Blanket threw back the hood of his capote, for his head was hot. His legs began to ache with the ceaseless lifting of the snow burdened snow-shoes. Would the child never cease whimpering—he was impatient with it now. But he made more broth and forced it to drink. Then he drank heavily of the hot liquid himself.

The tired feeling disappeared. His limbs were fresh as though the weight of many Summers had gone from him, and he laughed. Tuque came and sat at his side, looking into his face.

"*Ho-tay-oh*," said John Blanket in the language of his people, for beside him stood the brother who had been killed many years before. The trail, too, was green, and Tuque, his best beloved of all that famous succession of fine lead dogs, seemed sleek and fat instead of the gaunt, worn creature he had unhooked from the traces an hour before. There were intervals when reason held sway, and then terror clutched John Blanket at this burning, itching fire beneath his skin.

In the morning he barely had strength enough left to place the child on the sled and harness the dogs. Beme bent to one side to break the sled loose from where it had frozen fast—a task that John Blanket usually did himself—and Tuque strained forward, but the others held back. The Indian raised his whip, but it fell harmlessly among them, and brought defiance instead of shrinking obedience.

Again he tried, futilely, for his arm lacked the power to make the long lash crackle on their flanks. One of them snarled and turned, and that one died. On him leaped Tuque, sublime, terrible in his rage, crunching his great teeth through the spine at the base of the neck.

John Blanket took the body out of the traces, leaving an empty space.

Now the others bent to their task and the Indian dropped back to the rear of the sled, holding on and steadying himself in a crouching position, his legs dragging heavier at every stride. Occasionally he laughed and talked, but he held grimly to the sled, and still Tuque led on.

All that morning the team plunged into the drifts, winding in serpentine fashion through the forest, unaided by the guiding commands they were accustomed to, but with the great, dark creature in front picking his way unerringly where the going was best.

Early that afternoon John Blanket's fingers began to stiffen. At last one hand lost its hold and he sagged to his knees, dragging along after the sled. But he managed to stagger up, uncertain and wabbling, to fight on grimly, impelled by the instincts that demanded life. A short distance he went thus, hanging forward with body almost doubled and only the desperate, ebbing grip of his hands on the pole supporting him.

Then he crashed face downward on the sled with his head resting among the bags that held the mail, his snow-shoes dragging grotesquely at the side. The dogs, exhausted and eager for a rest, halted momentarily at this addition to the weight, and Tuque half turned to look back. Then he wheeled forward, the traces tightened and the sled straightened away through the silent forest, while on it John Blanket lay immovable although occasional bits of muttered, meaningless jargon came from him.

At last the stars came out, and in the north the great lights flashed their varicolored streamers across the sky, throwing a weird glow over the white surface in the open places. Below, weaving in and out among the trees like a dark, creeping shadow, the mail sled forged on. From beneath the coverings a childish cry betokened life while the still figure of the Indian remained with lariganed feet hanging over at a grotesque angle, the snow-shoes torn away by the brush.

Two more spaces in the harness were empty, the chewed thongs showing the method of the dogs' escape. Only Tuque, Beme and one other plunged on. Thus morning found them, still going, and the third dog writhed loose and was gone as they came out into the open near the bank of the river that led down to the post.

The descent was steep and Tuque backed up beside the old sledge dog, holding back their load and sliding and scrambling as it pushed them down on to the surface of the ice, swept clear now by the wind. An hour passed and old Beme began to falter, despite the easier going on the glassy surface of the stream. Tuque sank lower in the traces

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and advanced in a series of short leaps, throwing the full weight of his heavy shoulders against the collar in a way that made the sled advance by sharp jerks.

At last Beme fell, struggled vainly to arise, and lay still. Tuque waited, laboring hard in his breathing. Then he crouched and leaped. The sled gave way and advanced, and the great dog's claws caught and held the ice. Occasionally he slipped and sprawled, but surged up again always with his full weight snapping the traces taut.

Around a bend in the stream a shelving bank protruded and beneath its protection the snow was piled high. Halfway through it Tuque stopped and sagged down, his tongue, red and dripping, hanging from the side of his mouth. He looked back. There was old Beme, stiff in death now, and farther back, on the sled, the Indian lay with one mitten torn off and the hood of his capote back, revealing his bloated face only half hidden among the mail sacks.

From beneath the covering on the sled a whimpering cry came, and Tuque's tail wagged feebly. At last he arose and stalked back almost to the sled. Then he turned, pawed an instant and charged. The traces tightened, the sled jerked forward, and Tuque fell on his breast, but dug deep with his rear paws and was up, straining forward anew until his strength gave out. Then he waited, gathering all his latent powers, and the performance was repeated, the sled passing the last of the snow and gliding out on to the ice again.

At intervals he stopped and dropped on to his belly, panting hard despite the cold, but was up and on always before the sled could freeze fast. His head hung low, the great jaws a few inches above the ice, and he no longer swayed from side to side but leaned straight ahead.

The day began to ebb as another bend in the stream neared, and that same stretch of white foretold the heart-rending struggle to come. Over the jutting headland a faint wisp of blue smoke curled up into the gray sky and Tuque fought onward.

At last he was there, but the sled sank deep in the snow. His paws threw up the soft, white surface and he struggled valiantly, to the utmost of his strength, but could not budge the weight behind him. His head dropped, then his shoulders and he fell on to his side. Spasmodically he writhed up on to his haunches and sought to forge ahead, but weakness was in his vitals, and he sagged down slowly, like one overcome by sleep.

At the post the ancient factor looked out and saw the dark object there in the snow. He gazed intently, then a sharp exclamation burst from him and he called the doctor who also taught the wilderness of the white man's God. Together they raced toward the sled and cut the carcass of Beme loose.

The factor lifted the still warm body of Tuque and placed it beside John Blanket. Then he caught up the traces while the medical man pushed at the rear and they hastened toward the post, stopping at an isolated cabin. Together they lifted John Blanket and carried him inside. A faint cry came from beneath the covering on the sled and the factor opened it.

Scarred veteran of one of those fearful epidemics himself he did not falter but clasped the child close and carried it within the cabin. There John Blanket, in his delirium, started to rave while the medical missionary had already begun his fight to save the body surrounding the old heathen's soul.

"—— fine dog," murmured John Blanket in broken fashion. "No sell um, no trade um; —— fine dog."

The factor came out and stopped at the side of the sled whereon lay Tuque, stiff and cold now.

He took off the mail and threw it into the snow to be purged before distribution. Then he picked up the traces and hauled the sled off into the forest where he piled dry brush over and about it.

A few moments later he emerged into the clearing by the river's edge again while in an open space in the forest consuming tongues of red and yellow flame licked high.

"—— fine dog," he repeated.

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A SON OF STRIFE

A Three-Part Story
Conclusion

By ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "Claymore," "Man to Man," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

SIR GUI DE TABERIE of Nerak, in the marches of Outremer that formed the borderland between the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem and the Saracens of Saladin, was a man of strong passions.

Deep in his love, fierce in his hate, he left a heritage to his only son, Matteo, that might have crushed the spirit of any man. It was a heritage of shame, outlawry, and the peril of an implacable vengeance.

Sir Gui had won his mate, Horazahde, from the desert, overwhelming the caravan of the Prince of Emesa, who was despatching her to the Emir El-Afdel as an unwilling bride, and carrying her off to his castle eerie.

She came to him willingly, caught in the fire of his romantic passion. But she scorned the ties of the Church with which Fray Gilberto wished them to be bound. Even when Matteo was born she still fiercely protested against the Christian rite.

"I am of the desert," she exclaimed. "And I am yours because you took me. No *hoiji* nor priest could make me more your wife."

So the child grew to be a man, adored by his father's retainers, and accorded all the consideration of a young prince. He had the spirit of both the Frank and Saracen, fused in a leaping flame of courage and loyalty.

His companion and instructor was Ali Ma'akwaa, the gentle-voiced but hard-hitting captain of Turcoples. From him he learned something of the art of war; and from John the Englishman, his father's friend, he got the gentle art of jongleurie—the art of improvising ballads and setting them to stirring strains—a rare art in days of daily strife.

There came a day when the vengeful Prince of Emesa with his ally, the Emir El-Afdel, rushed out of the desert in a slashing foray upon Nerak. Through treachery the castle was taken. Flames swept the stronghold. Behind a heap of his enemies the old lion finally fell, and the fair Horazahde died with him.

Turning as he fell, the knight shouted:

"Live, my son! Live, Matteo! For vengeance!"

Ali Ma'akwaa and the youthful Matteo, the only survivors, fled to the neighboring castle Mardan, of the Count Renier de Chappes. But this knight refused him help. Spurning him as an outcast without a name, he might have done him violence instead; but Ali and Matteo, at the points of their daggers, won free—a bleak, friendless world before them, and a tradition of hate behind.

Matteo had once aided a refugee to escape from Manasses, the son of Renier de Chappes, and this had intensified their hate. On the other hand he had gained the friendship of Brygas, Renier's ward—and a curious ring which Kafur, the grateful refugee, had hurriedly thrust upon him.

With only these memories of living friendship, Matteo and his comrade turned their horses toward the sea, determined to secure the help of John the Englishman, and Messer Gambaglio, a Genoese, of Tripoli, who had been his father's banker.

Equipped only with a gittern, upon which Matteo strummed the accompaniments of his own ballads, they came to Acre and embarked on an Italian ship for Tripoli. They were armed as men-at-arms pledged to fight for the *patrono* if pirates attacked them.

On the third day a pirate ship bore down on them, grappled, and drove the defenders in a struggling mass back upon the poop. Here Matteo, caught in the arms of the pirate chief, felt that he was about to die, when the leader caught sight of his dagger-hand, and recoiled with a cry.

"Forgive me, lord," he mumbled thickly. "You should have given me the sign."

And he called off his pirates and pushed clear.

Matteo slipped Kafur's ring—the Ring of Sinan—from his finger and put it in his pouch.

"A pirate may honor it," said he; "but a Christian Templar would cut its possessor down."

At Tripoli they found the house of Gambaglio, but the banker scornfully denied them, demanding proofs of identity that Matteo did not possess.

In a murderous temper they sought out an inn.

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Here they imposed upon the inn-keeper, and procured a room.

A moment later the door flew open and Gambaglio entered, falling upon his knees, protesting that he had only just had word from the *patrono* of the pirate's attack.

"The sign!" exclaimed the Genoese. "Had you but told me, you could have had whatever you sought."

"Why?"

"Because you speak for the Lord of Death; and I, too, am of the circle of agents of the Old Man of the Mountain."

When the banker had gone, Matteo looked dazedly at his comrade, the Turcople.

"Ali, heard you what I heard?"

"Lord," stammered Ali, "there was talk of this and that—an old man—great treasure——"

"Aye," mused Matteo grimly, "and of vast peril!"

NOW, rich in funds, the two comrades made their way to Antioch, where John the Englishman received Matteo cordially, and presented him to Prince Bohemond. Bohemond was in a mood of savage depression.

With a *chanson* of their ancestors and the splendor of their deeds, Matteo lifted the melancholy warrior to new enthusiasm. Bohemond flung a necklace of gold over the jongleur's head. The next instant he recoiled with fear.

"John!" he cried. "'Tis an Assassin!"

Matteo had barely time to tell his story; but he was believed, and became a valued member of the prince's household. His fame as a jongleur soon spread to other parts; and when Amalric, King of Jerusalem, visited Antioch, Matteo not only won his praise, but also the friendship of his son, Baldwin.

In the train of Amalric were Brygas de Kergac—the only woman who had ever held Matteo's eyes for more than a fleeting glance—and Manasses, his open enemy. Stung by an insult of Manasses, the jongleur renounced the name of Nerak, and before the whole assembly struck the knight in the face.

Forbidden the right of combat, Matteo made up his mind to renounce the dalliance of court life and begin to seek his revenge. At this opportune moment he was mysteriously summoned to Massiaf, the stronghold of Sinan.

Here the King of the Assassins—after failing to overcome Matteo with temptations—offered to become his ally.

"I will guarantee death to those whom you hate!"

And he named Achmet-ibn-Muros, Prince of Emesa; El-Afdel; and Renier de Chappes. Together the two planned revenge.

Disguised as jongleurs and tumblers, the Assassins journeyed to the court of the Prince of Emesa, whose grandson, Feizul-ibn-Khalid, was about to marry the granddaughter of the Emir El-Afdel. They penetrated to the sleeping-apartments at night, and killed the emir. At the last moment Matteo's resolution failed him, and he spared his grandsire and cousin, but secured from them an oath of alliance with Sinan.

Upon returning to Massiaf Matteo was urged to undertake another mission.

"I want a monk," said the Lord of Death, "for my conversion!"

At Jerusalem Matteo found King Amalric at the point of death. His friend, John the Englishman, was in attendance; and through him Matteo reached the bedside of the king—but only in time to sing the warrior's death-song.

Turning to Baldwin, the jongleur saluted the new king.

Later there came to Matteo the Count de Pugne, a young friend of Bohemond's court. De Pugne asked Matteo's good offices with Brygas, whom he loved. Torn by his own love and loyalty to his friend, Matteo endeavored to reach the maiden's side and gain her confidence. But her guardians suspected Matteo; and she had only an opportunity to tell him wistfully that she was to be taken to Nerak, which had been reconstructed and was now the castle of de Chappes.

"And I am to be kept there until I yield."

"Yield?" he repeated.

"Until I marry Manasses."

CHAPTER XXII

HOW MANASSES ACCUSED MATTEO OF MURDER

MATTEO was on his way to the hall of audience where the council of the kingdom was to meet, for he was now the king's body-squire, as well as jongleur, and his duties required attendance at all state ceremonies. But he spied Francçois de Pugne sitting very disconsolate in a window-niche, and crossed to his friend's side.

"Why so gloomy, François?" he asked. "'Tis a sprightly day."

"Nay, 'tis dark and desolate wherever I look," returned de Pugne. "I would gladly be quit of this place."

"What hath irked you?"

"By my sword, I have not been the same man since Brygas de Kergac hath gone hence," replied François mournfully.

"Aye, the court is again in mourning," assented Matteo, trying to keep his own voice light.

"And do not you, yourself, suffer in that quarter?" demanded de Pugne shrewdly.

Matteo sighed, and dropped his hand on the young knight's shoulder.

"Whether I do or not is a matter of no moment, comrade," he said. "I am too lowly to look up to the heights she stands upon. Nay, the utmost I may do is to endeavor as occasion serves to advance the cause of my dear friend."

De Pugne clutched his hand eagerly.

"Say you so, in sooth, Matteo? St. Cornelius knoweth I would rather have your aid then any other's!"

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"'Tis scarce likely to be of any avail," answered Matteo.

"Nay, you have a way of succeeding where others are thrown at the barriers. I'll pin hopes to you."

"Then cheer yourself, lad, I must attend the council."

He hooked his arm in John the Englishman's, as he spoke, and the two joined the procession of lords and clerical dignitaries entering the hall of audience.

"Where is de Chappes?" asked the old jongleur as they found places at the king's end of the board.

"Is he not here?" replied Matteo indifferently. "Nay, I have not seen him."

Baldwin entered before John could speak again, and the lords of the council rose to greet him. For all his youth and the conflicting interests which stormed around him, he was liked—aye, loved—by the great majority of them.

"A benison upon you, lords," the boy king said pleasantly. "There is little for your attention today. The embassy to the Soldan of Babylon hath been dispatched. My cousin, the Prince of Antioch, hath sent his galleys to sea to chastise the pirates who lately raided the coast of Tripoli. And I shall hear with interest your views concerning the guardianship of the Crown. How chances it that Messer de Chappes does not attend?"

"'Tis through no feeling of discourtesy, sire," replied Milo de Planci, who was closest of those present to de Chappes. "He was absent from his lodging this morning, and his son had gone in search of him."

There was a faint snicker of amusement, for de Chappes was known for a man of loose habits. Baldwin ignored it.

"Doubtless he will explain for himself," he said. "Now, prithee, lords——"

There was a commotion at the entrance of the chamber. Voices sounded in heated colloquy, and Manasses de Chappes burst in.

Baldwin rose in cold anger.

"What means this intrusion?" he demanded. "Do you think to take your father's place?"

"Ah, lord, my father is dead," cried Manasses.

"Dead?" exclaimed the King in horror.

A tense silence fell upon the council table.

"Aye, dead!" repeated Manasses. "But, nay, my grief confuses me. I should say murdered! Struck down without a chance to defend himself."

"Where did this happen?" interposed Count Raymond of Tripoli.

"Aye, you may well ask!" snarled Manasses. "Is your dagger clean, lord count? But no, you would never do the deed yourself. There are——"

"Have a care, Manasses!" called de Planci, who had been his father's friend.

"Loose talk leads nowhere!" growled Count Joscelin de Courtenay, grand seneschal of the kingdom and uncle of the king.

"Nay, nay, the lad speaks with reason," interposed the Master of the Templars. "He hath seen his father's blood. Be sure, lords, Messer de Chappes hath not been slain by any ordinary murderer."

Other lords rumbled warnings or displeased comments. Count Raymond said nothing, an ironic smile upon his face. An enemy had been removed from his path. Hard words meant little, and could be avenged at need.

"But surely there was some indication of the kind of person who slew Messer Renier?" said John the Englishman.

"Only a wound three fingers wide in his breast," groaned Manasses, and he covered his face with his hands—but not before the old jongleur's eagle glance had marked the grin of satisfaction which mingled strangely with unsimulated grief.

"Where was it?" pressed John.

"In a wine-shop by the Sion Gate. The scoundrelly keeper feared to bring me word last night. I am just come from there."

Matteo, standing behind the king's chair, had noted, too, the exultant anticipation and heart-felt grief on Manasses' mean face. But he put it down idly to a recollection of the price the wine-shop's proprietor had paid for the distinction of furnishing the scene of Messer Renier's death.

"Is that all you know, Messer de Chappes?" spoke up the king. "Only that your father's body was found in a wine-shop by the Sion Gate with a wound in the breast?"

Manasses' eyes darted up and fixed malignantly upon Matteo's face.

"Nay, that is not all, lord," he rasped. "I know there is one who hated my father—and hath hated me since childhood—who fancied he had cause for resentment against us!"

John the Englishman drew in his breath sharply. Matteo was mildly amused. But

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the king sank back in his seat with a gesture of relief.

"That hath a different sound," exclaimed Baldwin. "I like not to think such a murderer could conceal his identity. Who is he?"

"He stands behind you, lord king!"

And de Chappes pointed straight at Matteo. A gasp went up from the assembled lords. Baldwin turned his head to follow the pointing finger.

"Messer Matteo! The king's jongleur!" he cried protestingly. " 'Tis impossible!"

The drama of the moment gripped the men who lined the council table. Count and baron, bishop and abbot, leaned forward in their places.

"Ask him if he admits we hold Nerak by right!" shouted Manasses. "Ask him to take oath he doth not hate me—and that which was my father!"

Some lords nodded their heads affirmatively. Matteo was not any too popular in certain quarters. His influence with the king aroused jealousy. His friendship with the native lords displeased the "foreigners." The clergy, who had supported his mission from Sinan out of desire to add to their own prestige, none the less disliked to see the young king under the sway of a jongleur, for the jongleurs were the apostles of free-thinking in an age when the only other school of thought was that of the Church, and moreover, they were inclined to say openly what they thought.

"That is a fair demand," vouchsafed the Patriarch.

"But it means nothing, in all probability, if he doth answer it," suggested Baldwin.

"With your favor, lord, the matter should not rest," said Milo de Planci. "If Messer Matteo is innocent, suely he can prove it."

"This is what comes of having intercourse with the Assassins," boomed the Grand Master of the Temple. "Is there to be amazement that great lords are struck down in the Holy City when the king hath attached to his person one who carries Sinan's signet-ring?"

"Do you assume to criticize the king?" asked Baldwin.

The templar became confused before the quiet seriousness of this lad young enough to be his son.

"Nay—nay—not so—lord—I——"

"You speak foolishly," said the king relentlessly. "Prithee have done with it. Prejudice will not further the cause of Messer de Chappes nor will it be suffered to condemn Messer Matteo—who is no more responsible for the intercourse with the Assassins than any other lord of the council who voted for Sinan's treaty."

He turned and beckoned to Matteo.

"You have heard," he said. "What have you to say?"

" 'Tis false that I slew Messer de Chappes, lord," replied Matteo. "As to the rest, 'tis true I hate this man and must strive now not to continue a just hatred against one whose soul is doubtless this moment under trial in Purgatory for a life that was evil."

De Chappes broke forth, triumphant.

"Aye, said I not so?" He shook his fist at Matteo. "He may brazen it out, but he hath admitted the hatred. From that to the crime was a short step. How now, bastard, would you not have struck the blow whenever occasion served?"

" 'Tis like enough," agreed Matteo coolly.

"Aye, and you came hither to Jerusalem for no other purpose than to compass my father's death and mine! Am I not marked next on your list? And do you not plan to curry favor with the king to the end that he will grant you our estates when we are out of your way?"

Matteo shook his head contemptuously.

"That way did your father win all he had. What? Did he not sit close in his castle the while the Saracens slew my father? Did he not refuse even to pursue them? And why? So that he might lay claim to Nerak!"

John the Englishman cut short Matteo's speech by a decisive motion of his hand.

"What is said so far hath been of little use, sire," he said. "Messer de Chappes brings loose statements. Messer Matteo, I think, proves his honesty by the frankness of his admissions. But we do no more than stir ancient hatred afresh. Come, Messer de Chappes, you have made a charge. Prithee give us proof."

"Proof!" De Chappes goggled at the old jongleur's keen face. "Have I not given proof? Doth not this man admit his desire for my father's death?"

"Yet he denied killing your father, and you have said naught to carry conviction against him. Tell us why you think he killed Messer Renier?"

"But I have told you!"

"What you thought—yes. But now tell us what you know."

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"I know what I have told you."

John the Englishman leaned forward, a mocking smile creasing his wrinkled features.

"But, certes, Messer de Chappes, you must know more. You say Messer Matteo slew your father. Who saw him? Where is the keeper of the wine-shop?"

"Dead."

"Who slew him?"

"I did," admitted Manasses hesitantly.

"You?" Baldwin interrupted indignantly. "Is not Jerusalem the king's city? Since when have you held feudal rights here?"

"I crave your pardon, lord," said Manasses sullenly. "I was mad with grief over my father's death, and the varlet had tried to conceal it from me."

"You did most unwisely," commented John the Englishman. "What said the keeper of the wine-shop before he died?"

"Naught."

"But was there none who had seen the killing?"

Manasses shook his head, conscious of the trap he had been maneuvered into. John the Englishman sat back in his chair.

"So you have naught but your suspicions!" he concluded.

"But this is no way to leave so serious a charge," exclaimed the master of the Templars. "I would not seem to cry down Messer John, yet bethink you, lords, we know there hath been bad blood betwixt Messer Manasses and his late father and Messer Matteo. 'Tis an ill deed to slay by stealth in the Holy City. So grave a cause should be thoroughly tried."

"Aye, so," assented half a dozen barons.

"Let Messer Matteo be put on oath," suggested the patriarch.

"Right gladly," answered Matteo. "I say frankly to you, lords, I did not slay Messer Renier de Chappes, although I might have done so had an opportunity occurred in fair fight."

"Will you take oath to that?" asked the king with a puzzled frown.

"Aye, lord, by my name-saint and the True Cross and Mary's grace."

"'Tis an equivocal oath," declared the Templar. "He hath said, in effect, he would have done the deed if opportunity served. If, then, there was opportunity, why——"

He looked complacently at his neighbors.

"Frame me another oath, and I will subscribe to it," said Matteo wearily.

"Where were you last night, Messer Matteo?" questioned John the Englishman.

"In my room after the king dismissed me."

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt!" clamored de Chappes. "Lords, what a mockery! One of the great lords of the realm is slain treacherously by a bastard singer, and you debate it! Ah, ——, what a shame!"

"Was one with you?" continued John without noticing the interruption.

"Ali, my servant."

Manasses laughed with horrible glee.

"Nay, nay, lords, would not so clever a knave have instructed his servant how to conduct himself?"

Matteo addressed the king.

"Here is no ground for reason, sire. Whatever I say is twisted against me. But I am willing to stand my trial, and I challenge Messer de Chappes to prove his charge by ordeal of battle in the lists."

Several lords mumured approval. Trial by battle was the best way they knew to settle such a vexed question. But Manasses rebelled.

"What, lord?" he appealed to the king, his jaws working uncomfortably. "Am I to be compelled to meet on equal terms a bastard who is half a Saracen? He is not of knightly rank, let alone of honest birth."

"'Twould be an insult, no less," affirmed Milo de Planci.

And the Templar roared:

"Trial by battle is for men of gentle birth. What right hath this sprig of no race or family, who hath not a name of his own, to demand trial by battle?"

Baldwin would have answered with heat, but John the Englishman anticipated him.

"Messer Matteo hath proved his worth in many a bicker of the marches of Antioch. But if any scruple to meet him I shall be pleased to act in his stead. I thank the saints I can yet wield a trusty lance."

This was still less to Manasses's liking.

"I have no quarrel with you, Messer John——"

"But I have with you," interrupted John.

"Nay, nay," interceded the master of the Templars hastily, "'tis no fair plan to oppose a veteran like yourself, Messer John, to a young knight like Messer de Chappes. Nor is this quarrel your quarrel."

"It is my quarrel," returned the old jongleur in a voice that was icy cold, "and 'tis soon likely to be extended. What? Are men to tell John the Englishman what quarrels are his? Have a care, lord!"

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Baldwin stepped into the breach in time to avert challenges from half a score other barons.

"This hath gone far enough," he said decisively. "Messer Matteo, 'tis my will that you retire. I am convinced of your innocence, and I know that you will hold yourself in readiness to answer this or other charges. But for the nonce we can not tie up the business of the realm over a personal quarrel. Messer de Chappes, I shall hold you responsible for Messer Matteo's safety."

Outside the Hall of Audience Matteo was seized by de Pugne.

"De Chappes hath been slain," he whispered excitedly. "What think you of it?"

Matteo stared curiously at his friend. A sudden idea had popped into his brain. He remembered how downcast de Pugne had been. And now——

"What know you?" he countered.

"Naught. Why?"

"His son claims 'twas I."

De Pugne's face expressed only astonishment.

"You? He is mad, Matteo. If you would, you——"

"Oh, I would have done it any day in fair fight!"

"So would I. But he is gone, and few will mourn him. I wonder what that rascal Manasses will do about Brygas."

Matteo had the same thought, but as he walked away he was prodding his mind chiefly to discover who could have slain de Chappes. Manifestly it had not been de Pugne.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW MATTEO RODE TO NERAK

MATTEO looked up from the Saracen manuscript he was studying in Father William's scriptorium in search of material for his most ambitious work, the great "Romaunt of Outremer," which was afterward to supply the motif for two hundred years of chivalry. John the Englishman was leading in de Pugne by the arm, and there was a rebellious frown on the younger man's face.

"This wild lad was just about springing on his horse to ride to Nerak and slay de Chappes, Matteo," announced the old jongleur. "You must reason with him."

"Reason!" stormed de Pugne. "Tell him the rest of it! Matteo, that unspeakable cur hath sent in word he intends to marry Brygas this day week."

Matteo dropped his manuscript and his face went white. The news was all the more bitter because he had been expecting it from day to day.

"He had to make the attempt," he said quietly. "Best get it over with, François."

"You take it easily," exclaimed de Pugne. "I thought you——"

Something in Matteo's eyes warned him, and he broke off.

"By the Virgin, 'tis too much! That false, cowardly caitif to wed with her! We must stop it, I say."

"But how?" asked John the Englishman, his glance, curiously enough, fixed not on François, but on Matteo. "Did you expect alone to ride over the walls of Nerak and carry the maid hither?"

"I would try," cried de Pugne. "The king was sorely at fault when he refused to compel him to a trial of arms with Matteo these many days past."

"Nay, the king must think of others than ourselves," Matteo rebuked him. "Had I slain de Chappes or he me it would have set the two factions of the lords at each other's throats. But tell me more of your news. How came it?"

"All the 'foreigners' have received invitations to repair to Nerak for the marriage. Nigh half the court are going. The talk of it is all over the palace. And his father hath been in the grave scarce two weeks!"

"It must be he fears some one," remarked John the Englishman tentatively.

"He may," assented Matteo moodily.

"Aye, and he hath sent word he makes such unseemly haste because of his cousin's great love for him," added François heatedly. "Oh, it passeth all tolerance! I will ride for Nerak this day. If I slay him, well and good. If I am slain, 'tis better than seeing her fall into his hands."

"What is this dissension over a maid?" asked John gently. "Should we appeal to the king?"

"It would scarce be worth while, Messer John," answered Matteo. "She was his father's ward, and had been betrothed to him since babyhood. 'Twas not her wish, but what lords of the council would take that into consideration? Nay, here is a matter which calls for stealth and trickery, not force. Look you, François, are many people journeying to Nerak?"

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"I told you nigh half the court, with every jester, tumbler and trouvair at loose rein. There will be high feasting."

"Let be, let be, comrade! Now, hark to my counsel. This is an affair wherein I can work to better advantage than yourself. Nay, but hear me! You could never win entrance to Nerak by force, and you are incapable of the craft which is the alternative to force. 'Tis otherwise with me. I shall don gaudy raiment such as the strolling jongleurs wear, and fare thither with the common herd of entertainers."

"And then?" pressed François.

"Nay, I know not. I must cut my plans to fit the needs of the moment. I know Nerak well—or did in old days, and I doubt they have changed the castle much in rebuilding it. I shall seek speech with our lady. If she be willing—and doubt not she will—we shall fly together. Here you two must be ready with a priest handy, and she——"

"Which is she to wed?" asked John the Englishman quizzically.

Matteo flushed.

"Nay, 'tis an empty question," he answered. "Who am I that I should lend my name, which is not a name, to the most gracious demoiselle in the realm, aye, or in all Outremer? She will wed with François, if he please, and I trow there are few maids would deny so fine a knight."

"But failing that?" inquired John.

"There is the king. We will appeal to him. Certes, if a demoiselle is so persistent against a suitor as to flee in the night with a strolling jongleur, Baldwin may take pity on her."

"Anything, so we pluck her from Nerak," begged François. "You have the right of it, Matteo. None but you could do it. If you succeed, comrade, I shall be your man all my life."

"Not so," said Matteo, rising from his seat, "I do only that which I may for chivalry and a demoiselle beyond compare—and a knight I joy to call my friend. But do you seek out Ali for me. Here, take this ink-horn. Bid him use the contents to blacken the white of El-Manzur's fetlocks. It would not do for a mere strolling jongleur to be seen riding a famous war-horse."

François hurried from the scriptorium, pleased to have any task in connection with the freeing of his lady. John the Englishman drew closer to Matteo. The old jongleur's eyes searched out his face.

"Do you, in sooth, know what you are about to do?" he asked gravely.

"Touching the danger of it?" returned Matteo, surprized. "Aye, fair lord. But none but I should stand any chance soever."

"Nay, I speak not of danger—physical danger. You have sung much of women's hearts, Matteo. After all, what know you of them?"

Matteo pondered.

"Nothing, Messer John. Mayhap, less than nothing, for that sometimes I have reckoned I knew much."

"Ha, now do you show the beginnings of comprehension. I think, dear lad, you will soon know more. Perchance, you shall be amazed."

"What else would you have me do?" inquired Matteo, puzzled.

"I would not have you do otherwise. Nay, lad, ride on. Follow your star. But be not dismayed if it leads you contrary to your intent."

"You speak in riddles, Messer John."

"So are life and love and women riddles. Nay, they are parts of one riddle. But you have much to do. Carry a simple gittern. Be not too careful of your garments. And if you hope to live, be husky of voice when you sing. There is only one Matteo of Antioch—and you may not conceal a voice with an ink-horn."

"I will use all possible caution," answered Matteo gratefully, "and I leave it to you to make my peace with the king. Tell him no more than you can help. 'Twould be best to let him understand I have gone away on private business."

In the stable court Matteo found Ali awaiting him with two horses, armed and spurred.

"What, old wolf? Did you think to come?" he asked. "It may not be. I ride alone."

"You ride to danger," returned Ali doggedly. "Else you would never have ordered the inking of El-Manzur's fetlocks. And when you ride to danger, Ali Ma'akwaa's place is at your side."

"Why, that is so," laughed Matteo. "But this is no ordinary venture, and my best chance of safety is to ride alone. I am for Nerak, Ali."

"Nerak hath an ill sound," retorted the old Turcople. "Best have me with you, lordling."

"Nay, for I could not disguise you.

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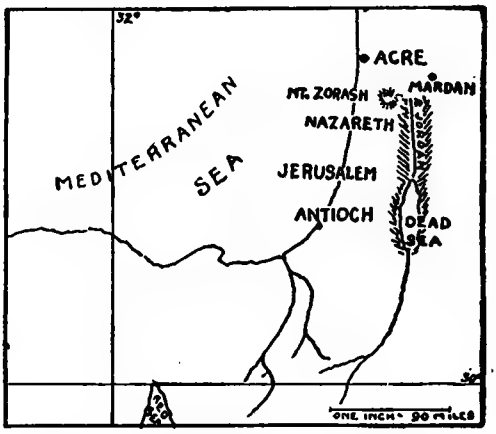
Come, lead El-Manzur out beyond St. Stephen's gate and await me there."

Grumbling and dissatisfied, Ali rode off, and Matteo, after a last word with de Pugne took his way into the city, where he sought out a certain shop in the Street of the Cloth Merchants, in which he doffed his clothes and donned instead a gaudy costume, tan of one leg and checkered red-and-green of the other, with a doublet of purple slashed with yellow. An Italian hat of blue velvet, embellished with a raking cock's feather, completed his costume.



With his dagger's edge he rapidly hacked a jagged edge to his hair, and the result defied his identification with the dapper young courtier who was known to every one in the palace as the king's jongleur. When he had tied a dozen ribbons of varying hues in knots all over his gittern he was inseparable in general appearance from the strolling minstrels who hung about every castle in the land.

So effective was his disguise that Ali would have driven him away with a curse when he approached the roadside where the Turcople sat holding the bridles of the horses.

"Aye, you are skilfully arrayed, Messer Matteo," admitted Ali with enforced gloom. "But you will yet be wishful you had me by you. I may be old, but I am still a man of my hands. However, I have taken thought to your safety. You can not well carry sword as a rag-tag merry-andrew, so I have affixed a little mace to your saddle-bow that should be a help in time of need."

He drew it from the leather sheath, a spiked steel knob at the end of a metal-ringed staff half an ell long.

"You did well," approved Matteo. "'Tis an excellent device. But I may not win success in this venture by slaying, old wolf, as I have told you. If I expected fighting or by fighting could attain my object, you should go with me. Now do you return to the palace and await me in patience."

"For how long, lord?"

Matteo considered.

"For five days. If at the end of that time you have not heard from me take counsel with Messer John and Messer François."

He vaulted into his saddle, and cantered off by the easterly track that ran toward the Jordan. Ali, being a fighting-man without imagination, did not even tarry to look after his master, but mounted his horse in turn and rode back into Jerusalem, convinced that the universe was all wrong. He had accompanied Messer Matteo to Antioch, to Massiaf and Emesa and many another place—and now he, Ali Ma'akwaa, of all men, was denied the privilege of riding at his master's side to Nerak, whence they had started together on their eventful wanderings.

Matteo's thoughts were of the future. After a spurt of a league, he reined El-Manzur into a jog-trot, not anxious to interest the highway with the spectacle of a jongleur in motley riding a lord's pace. Near Jericho he encountered a troupe of strollers, who, fortunately for him, were from Acre, even boasting of several travelers from Cyprus and Italy.

They hailed him for a member of their guild, and in their company he passed the night under the stars—for no monastery would offer entertainment to so godless a crew, whilst castle and tavern were overcrowded with the elect and their minions all journeying in the same direction.

A castle wedding was an affair of importance in Outremer, an opportunity for breaking away temporarily from the iron routine of a land that was always at war, whose inhabitants lived like the garrison of a border fortress. Hence all accepted Matteo's purpose as perfectly natural. Being unattached to any particular household, as he professed, it was a matter of course that he and all like him should head for the place where food and largesse might be expected in abundance.

He had cause to be thankful for his ragtag comrades in the morning when they were held at the roadside to give free passage to

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the company of Milo de Planci and several other barons of the "foreign" faction, who found diversion in the freakish antics of the strollers and lingered longer than suited Matteo. But his self-confidence was assured from the moment he overheard one Pierre of Acre rebuking a certain Provençal, Blaise of Carcassonne, for his contention that the greatest jongleurs of necessity hailed from the land of the *langue d'oc*.

"You speak arrant nonsense, Messer Blaise," asserted Pierre roundly. "There is no jongleur in all France like Messer Matteo d'Antioch, who is called the king's jongleur in Jerusalem and is become one of the great ones of the court. Aye, men say the king and his lords never move without asking advice of Messer Matteo, and he hath the power of charming the possessed with his voice. 'Tis like a church organ with trumpets."

"So you say," disputed the Provençal, "but have you heard him?"

"Nay, but all men say as I do."

"Have all men heard him?"

"All who can. Ha, here is our new friend, Messer Gerard"—for so Matteo had dubbed himself—"who is last from Jerusalem. You have heard the marvelous Messer Matteo, hey, lad?"

"Oh, I have heard him," answered Matteo, "but all men are not agreed concerning him. 'Tis a jealous world, my masters, and we are jealous folk. Naught pleases every one."

"There is no doubt Messer Fulke of Arles pleases all who have the luck to hear him," rejoined the Provençal triumphantly. "Bah, your Messer Matteo is good enough for this far land, but I speak of France, messers, of the heart of the world!"

"Since when was France the heart of the world?" demanded Jehan of Ascalon. "Is not Jerusalem the place appointed of the Last Judgment?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" bellowed a fat, greasy trouvair, who called himself Bomba and hailed from Florence. "So the priests say, but they say many other things, comrade. And he who has seen the L'ung Arno may have no doubts where is the fairest center of mankind. But a truce to our debate. Let us know what manner of man this great Messer Matteo is. Is he tall and of good presence like myself—a pox on your ribaldry, rogues! Hath he a sound palate for wines and ability to devour a sheep at a sitting? Hath he a quick eye for a frail wench?"

"Why, to say sooth, Messer Bomba," replied Matteo judiciously, "this Messer Matteo is a pallid, thoughtful young man, with long hair and wistful eyes. He lives on bread and lettuce leaves."

"Bah, then he is no jongleur, but a poet!"

Bomba, by universal assent, was elected chief of the company. A loud-voiced, hectoring rascal, he had seen most of the known world, and was adept at reaping a living from the weakness or gullibility of less vigilant men. But he was fairly representative of his followers. There was Nicola of Milan, a slim, ascetic man of middle-age, who had narrowly missed greatness. St. Roque of Champagne was a mixture of moss-trooper and songster. Morbou of Brittany, a dark, melancholy fellow, told stories that were overcast with the mystery of his Celtic blood.

Casper of Burgundy was a typical strolling jongleur, blatant, swift at stealing other men's songs and tales, vain, shallow, incapable of conceiving anything original. Marot and his "sister" Marette were tumblers and jugglers, who could turn head over heels and play lute and tambor the while. Elisa, a blind girl, who, Matteo suspected, saw more than many thought she could, was a singer, guided by a hoary old minstrel who passed as her father and bore the apt title of Tête Blanche. Misito of Cyprus was a jester, with a brainful of tricksy jests and no small skill at tumbling.

There were others, but this list gives the key to their characters. They stole from any who chanced in their way, would steal from each other at need. They had no manners and no morals, aped their betters and pretended to look down on all whom they met, save lords of castles and abbots of monasteries, who, as Bomba said, "had choice pickings and none to say them nay." Each, despite inborn laziness, now carefully cultivated as a virtue, had laboriously developed some natural gift or instinct to a degree sufficient to guarantee a moderately sure livelihood. For the rest, they feared neither king nor lord nor priest, God nor devil, but only hunger and prison and work.

Matteo they commanded to demonstrate his ability at the first village where they performed for food, and the fact that he sang an age-old geste, larded with commonplace lewdness, in a very ordinary voice, established him as safely mediocre and

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therefore one of themselves. Henceforth his popularity was assured. He had only to drift with the others, and especially to support Bomba and Misito, the two with the most liberal equipment of wits.

So the motley company forded Jordan, journeyed through the Judean hills and crossed the flanks of Mount Zorash, and as they approached nearer to the home of his race Matteo found himself drawing more and more aloof from the wastrels who surrounded him. It was the middle of the afternoon when they came out on the eastern slope of the mountain, and there on the far side of the intervening valley, high on its cliff, was perched the castellated bulk of Nerak.

Matteo's heart leaped into his throat. It was just the same. The vast keep soared above all. Baldwin's Tower, the Tower of Winds, the Black Tower, the Bowmen's Tower, the whole sweep of wall and turret was exactly as he had remembered it and pictured it in dreams. If Ali Ma'akwaa had been at his side, he could not have resisted the temptation to gallop on, certain that the last few years had been an evil dream, that Messer Gui, his father, and the Princess Horazahde his mother, Sir Antonio the Seneschal, Foray Gilberto, Gaspard the Poitevin, captain of the men-at-arms, and all the rest, would be waiting to welcome him home.

It was difficult to believe that the last time he had seen that picture the stonework had loomed like a skeleton fabric against the black smoke clouds that were the pall of all he held dear.

"A fair hold," remarked Bomba dispassionately as he surveyed it.

"You will find none like it in Italy!" retorted Pierre of Acre.

"Yet strong as it is, it was carried by the paynims six years back, its lord and his mistress slain and the whole wrecked by fire," quoth Misito.

"The which comment duly answers both Messer Pierre and myself," declared Bomba. "Since it proves that even so strong a castle is not safe from destruction, and lords and ladies may love at their ease behind stone walls no more securely than we in straw-stacks. But somewhat tells me there are oxen roasting in the kitchens and rich provender for hungry minstrels; so, on, brothers, on!"

The village under the castle walls, which de Chappes likewise had rebuilt, was thronged with men-at-arms. Tents had been pitched in the fields and crowds of retainers of various lords called out to the strollers to tarry with them and promised food and largesse in payment for entertainment. But Bomba would hear nothing of it.

"What?" he cried. "Where will you find a choicer company of thieves, pickers and doxies—I mean jongleurs, jesters and tumblers—than ourselves? Are we to be wasted on foot-sergeants, men-at-arms, camp servants, underlings? Nay, comrades, we are fit sport for lords and knights. Our beds shall be in the castle hall!"

He was cunning, that Bomba. He arrayed his company in order, Misito's warped, misshapen figure in the lead, then the tumblers and jugglers, then the jongleurs, trouvairs and singers on foot, and lastly the people on horseback, so that they presented quite a picture as they marched up to the castle gate. The drawbridge was down, and immense fires lighted the approach. The men-at-arms on guard roared with laughter at sight of the curious crew, Misito leaping and prancing in the van, Bomba bellowing obscene jests from the midst of his mounted bodyguard.

"Way! Way for the Lord of Misrule and his train!" shouted Bomba. "We are come to do honor to the lord of Nerak and his betrothed. None like us, fair friends, for tricksome jests, diverting romaunts, rare feats of tumbling and all fashion of white magic. Way! Way, I say! for the Lord of Misrule!"

Laughing still, the guards stood aside, and the motley column advanced upon the drawbridge.

"Strike up, lads and lasses, all!" ordered Bomba. "'The Hedge Priest's Wedding!' Do you play and sing and dance and jest for all you may. There should be princely largesse in this hold."

Through the dark gateway poured the raggle-taggle crew. Misito, in the lead, tossed up his jester's wand and threw a somersault in the air as they emerged into the outer court, lit by cressets and torches. Behind him Marot and Marette tumbled forward, playing and singing as they came. Other tumblers strove to rival them. Jugglers tossed balls and sticks and imitation animals, climbed each other's shoulders. The jongleurs and trouvairs strummed mightily, and their voices made the

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courtyard ring with the merry wickedness of "The Hedge Priest's Wedding."

Carried away by the humor of the event and the abandon of his companions, Matteo joined heartily in the song:

"The blue bells rang the wedding chime,
The skylarks sang the mass,
The nuptial couch was spread with thyme,
A wool smock clothed the lass.
And all the country folk were gay—
They thronged the gladsome woodland way
To see the hedge priest's wedding!
The hedge priest's Springtime bedding!"

On the steps of the great hall stood a company of lords and ladies laughing as unrestrainedly as the men-at-arms—all except one face! One face! It showed in the glare of the torches, wan, tired and very sad, unresponsive to the motley spectacle. It was the face of Brygas.

Matteo's voice caught in his throat; his fingers tripped on the strings.

"Play up! Play up!" mouthed Bomba in his ear. "We must make the fair wench smile!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MEDDLING OF SINAN

BUT the "fair wench" refused to smile. Cressets and flambeaux blazed higher; the audience roared with laughter; the entertainers redoubled their efforts. But she stared unseeing across the seething throng and the eddies of smoke.

"Belike, she doth not care for the song," whispered Matteo in Bomba's ear. "It is not seemly for maiden ears."

"A thousand curses on her, then," grumbled Bomba, panting from his efforts. "What's to do? If she glooms much longer she will destroy us. Others about her begin to look uncomfortable."

"Try 'How Many Leagues to Babylon?' " advised Matteo.

This was one of the most famous of his own chansons, and he continued shamelessly:

"It hath a jovial ring to it, and is well-known at the court of Jerusalem."

"Better that than this," agreed Bomba.

And the Florentine raised his bull voice in a shout of command.

"We have bedded the hedge-priest, lads and lasses all. Now, a song of Outremer for the nobles of Outremer! 'How Many Leagues to Babylon?' "

The gitterns, lutes and violas twanged and strummed the opening chords. Misito threw a double somersault. Matteo shifted his position to the side nearest to Brygas's position. Manasses, he noted, had frowned at the mention of a song, which, automatically, aroused thoughts of an enemy. But Brygas's face was losing the lifeless expression which had characterized it. Her cheeks began to flush. There was animation in her eyes. She peered down for the first time at the horde in motley.

Matteo drew a deep breath of anticipation, and lifted his voice—his own, true, golden voice that was the delight of kings and one of the great memories of the age—in the opening bars of the song that has come down through the centuries, albeit corrupted by adaptations and translations without number:

"In the budding Springtime all the land was gay,
And I rode forth from Ascalon a-chanting of my lay!

'How many leagues to Babylon?'
I asked a yeoman brown.
' 'Tis many more than you may ride,'
He answered, louting down,
'For Saracens are in your path,
And they are folk of dreadful wrath,
Who flout our fair king's crown.'

'Best get you to Jerusalem, Jerusalem,' he cried.
' 'Twas there our blessed Saviour was crucified and died.'

'But I am all for Babylon,'
I told the honest knave.
'Alas, alas,' he answered me,
'You'll go there as a slave!
'Tis many a league of sandy track
And few who travel it come back.
You ride unto your grave!' "

He dared not sing for long without the husky overtones that were his principal disguise. Several of the losels nearby turned at once to see which of their company was chanting so featly, but he stood in the shadow of a buttress of Gui's Tower, and they were too deeply interested in the prospect of largesse to permit their attention to be permanently distracted. What Matteo most dreaded was the observation of Manasses or any one of a dozen lords and knights who stood beside the young lord of Nerak and Mardan.

So while he dared he put his whole heart into his voice, and kept his eyes glued on the face of Brygas. She was a study in bewilderment. At the first soaring burst of melody from his throat she had swept the

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crowd with her glance, and lifted one hand in a quick, glad gesture to her breast. Then she was mastered by confusion. The color flamed in her cheeks. Her eyes dropped. And Matteo's voice dropped with them.

But he stepped out from the shadow of the buttress, and fixed his eyes upon her, willing, hoping, praying that she would look up again. Presently she did look up, puzzled, troubled, hopeful, yet wistfully foreboding disappointment. Her eyes scanned the tumultuous scene, envisaging slowly the antics of Misito, the feats of Marot and Marette, the comical egotism of Bomba. One by one she examined the fools in motley. Matteo, in a fever of impatience, feared she would never carry her inspection to his adjacent corner, and he feared no less the risk of revealing himself to Manasses if he made himself unduly conspicuous.

She looked twice at Morbou the Breton, who was dark and slim like Matteo, and Blaise of Carcassonne and St. Roque the Champagnoix, who were men of fine appearance beneath their gaudy raiment. But her wise eyes rejected all three as he whom she sought. She searched on, carefully, painstakingly, face by face, neglecting not even the draggle-tail drabs who clustered on the edges of the group. And at the long last she saw Matteo.

The courtyard swam before his eyes in that moment, and his voice cracked in his throat. One string of his gittern snapped, but the "spang!" was drowned in the uproar. When he had self-command again his lady had resumed her expression of far-away abstraction, but the wan hopelessness was gone from her face, and her eyes seemed to be looking out beyond the courtyard, with its flickering torches and high-coursed walls, into some realm of pleasant prospects which she alone might see.

The song died in one final rousing chorus, and as from a vast distance he heard the harsh voice of Manasses inviting the entertainers within the great hall.

"By my soul, you are a lusty pack of varlets! Come in, and you shall have all you can drink in return for your pains!"

"Rash words, lord, rash words!" japed Misito.

"We will try your measure and the depth of your bellies," rejoined Manasses amid laughter. "Keep us merry, and we will keep you full. We are feasting in Nerak, and there is a manchet of bread and a bone and a stoup of wine for whoever does his share. There are rushes on the floor when you are sleepy, and we ask no more than that you shall be gay with the rest of us."

Bomba swaggered forward.

"The Lord of Misrule doth heed the invitation of the Lord of Nerak," he announced pompously, "and he pledges the aid of all enfeoffed to him in the aiding and abetting of such merry-making as may be devised. On, knaves, on!"

And lords and vagabonds streamed through the wide doors in one mingled procession, jugglers juggling, tumblers tumbling, jongleurs and trouvairs singing or playing each whatever he listed, and lords and ladies enjoying mightily the sensation of being at elbow's touch with disrepute.

Manasses led the way. Brygas drew slightly to one side of the entrance, and as Matteo passed her he heard her say to the duenna who attended her, an ancient, wrinkly visaged dame:

"Nay, I am weary, Madame Ursula, and the smoke stings my eyes. I will have no more of this uproar. It makes my head ache. I think I shall tarry a while in the garden under the Tower of Winds."

Matteo walked as slowly as he could, but he did not dare to look at her and as he entered the great hall Bomba fastened upon him.

"Who was that chanting like an angel in the court, Gerard? By the ——'s toenails, I knew not we had such a voice in the company! Let us seek him out, and present him to the lord and his guests. He will sing the bezants out of their pouches."

Matteo regarded him with a simulation of immense surprize.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible! My dear Bomba, did you not realize— But, no, 'tis impossible!"

"Realize? Impossible?" repeated Bomba. "What is all this?"

"Why, your voice, no less!"

"My voice?"

"Even so. Your voice. And by all the saints, and Cecilia not the least of them, I do not believe there is a better in Christendom when once you let it go."

Bomba scratched his head.

"My voice? Come, that was never my voice we heard?" he said, half doubtingly.

"Whose else?" responded Matteo. "Nay, nay, Bomba, you are overmodest, and you do not usually let yourself go, give way to

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the urge of the moment. But you should do it oftener. It is a wonderful voice, without rival."

Bomba was convinced.

"I always said I could sing with the best of them," he admitted. "By the Cross, that is so! Well, who better than I to entertain the company? I'll give them a treat. Who would have expected to find a voice like mine in a desert hold of the eastern march? By the power of ——, I'll show them a rare piece of jongleurie!"

"Aye, comrade, that is the way to talk. Be not too modest. 'Tis you will win the bezants."

Manasses and his guests were seated on the dais. Servants and soldiers of the castle garrison lined the walls. The entertainers were in the open space by the door, and half a dozen of them were busy already, but Bomba strode to the front and demanded silence.

"Peace, friends, peace!" he ordered majestically. "I, Bomba, the great Messer Bomba, of Florence, famous in many countries as a trouvair and soon to be famous as a jongleur, shall amuse the noble lords and their ladies with a chanson they will never forget. My voice, illustrious ones, you will have marked already. 'Tis of a caliber seldom heard outside the courts of Italy."

And straightway he began to sing, in a voice like a rusty file, a ditty of road and camp, the coarse humor of which went ill with his frantic gestures and posturings. But the combined effect was so ridiculous that Manasses and his guests were overcome with mirth, and the commonalty along the walls rolled on the floor. Even Bomba's following were at a loss to know whether to hail his performance as a new feat or to question their own sanity. But the Florentine, himself, never doubted the effect he was achieving. He sang on whole heartedly, and under cover of the renewed uproar he created Matteo slipped through a doorway into the passage that ran back to the Tower of Winds.

The bare stone corridor was exactly as Matteo remembered it of old. The vaulted roof echoed his footfalls faintly as it had in boyhood. The same shadows hovered and swooped before him in the scant light of torches set in stone rings. But he did not meet a soul. All whose duties kept them in that portion of the castle had jammed into the great hall to watch the festivities conducted by the Lord of Misrule.

"What a chance for a Saracen raid!" muttered Matteo to himself, and his thoughts jerked back six years to that last night, with its weaving flames and puddling blood and wild cries of hysterical fright.

But he banished these memories as quickly as they mustered their array. Ahead of him he saw the postern which gave upon the olive garden with its terrace that looked out upon Mount Zorash, the terrace—although he did not know it—on which Horazahde had surrendered to Gui de Taberie. The postern stood open.

On the threshold he hesitated, striving for clear-headed perception of his task. There was a rustle in the garden. Was it the wind in the olive trees? He stepped through the narrow door. Overhead the sky was speckled with stars. The air was very still. Brygas stood, a dark, muffled shape against the parapet. But stay! Was it Brygas?

Yes, it moved. It moved toward him.

"Matteo!" it sobbed.

And then they were in each other's arms, pressing each other tight, cheek to cheek, voiceless, throbbing, forgetful of all else.

It was Matteo who tore himself away, rebelling in every limb, sick at heart, trying to discipline shaken nerves, telling himself this could not be, denouncing inwardly disloyalty to his friend, cursing mentally the bonds that restricted him. Of this turmoil Brygas vaguely sensed some small part and was disturbed accordingly.

"Be not cast down," she chided sweetly. "I do not fear. I knew that you would come. I know now that you will save me from the misery that confronts me. Certes, God, and Our Lady, His Mother, will aid the knight who fights on behalf of one in my plight. For otherwise I may not live. I have sworn it."

"You are such a lady as any knight might joy to fight for," answered Matteo, kissing the hand she left in his grasp. "But you know, as I have oft told you, I am no knight, albeit willing to dare all for you. There are others, far better than I, would have come, but only I might hope to deceive your warders."

"None would I welcome as I welcome you," she murmured shyly.

Matteo shivered with the effort of repressing his desire to clasp her again.

"For that you feel for me as you do, dear

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lady, I can say only that I am unworthy," he replied, with clammy brow. "But time presses, and I must not endanger you——"

"Nay, they are all occupied with the revelry of your tawdry company."

"Aye, fit companions for me," rejoined Matteo bitterly.

The hurt his words did showed in her voice. Her body sank against his.

"You know I mean not that!" she said proudly. "What? You, Matteo of Antioch, the friend of the king, the beloved of——"

"Stop!" he gasped in agony. "Nay, say no more! Brygas, I—Prithee, dear lady, do not stir my love too deep, else may I drown therein, and perchance you with me. Let us remember we have only some few hours in which to compass your salvation. Time presses. I must return to the hall before any miss me."

She did not draw away from him, but the gladness drooped out of her figure.

"Aye, you say sooth," she agreed. "Well, what is it to be?"

Matteo led her to the cliff edge.

"Do you see this descent?" he asked. "Down this I went on a certain night you wot of, and Ali, my servant, with me. Think you you, too, could venture it?"

"I do not know fear—except of men's wickedness," returned Brygas.

"Good! Make a rope of cloths—have you plenty?"

"My bridal chest," she laughed mirthlessly. "What better use for them than to compass my escape?"

"'Twill serve," he said. "I shall take my horse forth of the castle in the morning. I will return here tomorrow at this time, and you must be waiting. You must dispose of your women—I'll see there is another entertainment in the great hall. Then we two will descend the cliff. If I can come by a second horse, you shall have him. Otherwise, El-Manzur must carry double."

"And then?" she asked eagerly.

"And then?" he repeated. "Why—Jerusalem."

She said nothing for a moment, then—

"Jerusalem," she sighed.

"Why?" he asked, almost impatiently. "What would you instead?"

"Nay, I know not—unless it be a grove in the desert—and you."

Matteo retreated from her, holding up his hands as though in self-defense.

"Tempt me not, lady," he cried hoarsely. "I—I—must act as a knight—though I do not wear spurs."

"Tempt you!" she said, surprized. "Am I not your——"

He caught her to him, rough and impassioned.

"Tonight—yes!" he whispered. "Afterward—there are the king, and—and others."

She raised her lips. He fought uselessly, yielded, then forced himself away.

"Forget—tonight," he muttered, and fled.

The riot in the great hall was still in full swing, but he had no stomach for it. By a connecting passage he gained the flight of stairs leading to the minstrels' gallery to which he and Ali had fled that last awful night of slaughter in Nerak. The door of the gallery was thrust back; several torches glowed in sconces; a number of men lounged on the low parapet or lay on the floor. By their garments Matteo recognized them for brother minstrels, although not of the company he had traveled with.

But he had no more hunger for their conversation than for the ribald mirth which Bomba and his crew were spreading below. He picked an unoccupied corner of the parapet and stood there, leaning against the wall, brooding over the mad scene.

Bomba at last had been persuaded to cease singing, and two wenches of the troupe were dancing in the Saracen style to the music of their several masters. Most of the company were eating and carousing on the rushes. But Bomba and Misito were on the dais, jesting and japing with their betters, who enjoyed the salty discourse with the full-flavored appetite of the time.

Matteo felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Let be," he said impatiently. "Whoever you are, I seek no company."

"Not so, Messer Matteo," replied a low voice. "I am he you seek—or I miss my guess."

Startled, Matteo swung on his heel to confront a slim Italian tumbler in bifurcated yellow and red, with a belled jester's cap. The face was shrewd, watchful.

"Kafur!" he exclaimed.

"Not so loud," counseled the Assassin, throwing a hasty glance over his shoulder. "How come you here, lord. I did not know you were to be in this—and 'tis seldom Sinan fails to trust me."

"In what?" countered Matteo.

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Kafur's eyes probed his face.

"Are we not here on the same business?"

"How can I tell without knowing yours?" returned Matteo.

"Strange," muttered Kafur to himself. "This is your business that I do, but you know it not; and when I come I find you here in disguise. Surely lord," he added with sudden appeal, "you can trust me. When did Sinan send you word? It must have been very recent or——"

"I tell you I know nothing about your errand," retorted Matteo. "I know nothing of Sinan, wish to know nothing of him. But you say this is my business. Wherefore?"

Kafur shook his head, and the bells on his cap jingled softly.

"It passes understanding," he said. "But in so muddled a mess honesty is the only policy. I will tell all, lord, if you, too, will tell what brings you hither."

"My own affairs," said Matteo briefly. "And you?"

"Your own affairs," answered Kafur, a twinkle in his eyes. "Know, lord, that you have pleased Sinan greatly by the agility with which you carried to success his treaty with the young king. He hath had no trouble since with the Templars, and it hath increased enormously his prestige with the Saracen princes, who fear him more than ever. The Old One always pays his debts, Messer Matteo, and——"

"He owes me nothing," interrupted Matteo.

"That is not his view," persisted Kafur smoothly. "He is in your debt. Therefore he hath set out to repay it."

A sudden light flooded Matteo's brain.

"De Chappes!" he whispered. "You——"

Kafur nodded.

"Not I, lord, but one whose hand moved in tune with my brain."

"And here?"

"This is to be the completion of your vengeance," explained Kafur. "First, the father; then, the son."

"And now you—" Matteo choked—"here in—this—castle?"

"We shall make a clean sweep of Nerak, lord. The Old One plans to return it to you as when you lost it."

Matteo grasped the Assassin by both shoulders.

"Curse you and your meddling master, with your mysterious crimes and evil practises!" he hissed, shaking him viciously. "Do you think to serve me? Nay, you are like to dig my grave, and ruin my fortunes! Tell me all! Everything, so that I may save what I can from the wreckage of your plots."

CHAPTER XXV

HOW MATTEO RAISED THE KINGDOM

"SOFTLY, Messer Matteo, softly!" Kafur seemed not to mind the shaking so much as the danger of their conversation attracting attention. But the minstrels' gallery was dimly lighted, and its occupants were worn out by a hard day of fun-making and glad to take advantage of the opportunity of relaxation furnished by the arrival of Bomba's troupe. They remained oblivious to the dramatic dialog conducted by the tumbler and the jongleur next the parapet above the great hall.

"You fool!" snarled Matteo. "Do you not know that young de Chappes hath charged me with the slaying of his father? 'Tis I must answer for your foul deed!"

An expression of concern flitted across the Assassin's face, but disappeared immediately.

"That I do not understand," he admitted. "There was no evidence to connect you——"

"Save that I was known for his deadly enemy!" interjected Matteo scornfully.

"But doubtless the error can be set right," continued Kafur equably.

"As how?"

"We shall remove the young man in any case, lord. After his death, who will push the charge?"

"So you had it all planned out?"

"Aye, Messer Matteo. There can be no escape for him. Achmet-ibn-Muros will see to that."

It was Matteo's turn to show surprize.

"How comes Achmet into this affair?"

Kafur shrugged his shoulders.

"As you should know, lord, Sinan is a master in his way. He planned your vengeance with great care. He takes pride in such exploits. 'Twas he sent me to Emesa to arrange for the taking of Nerak."

Matteo's heart stopped beating.

"Stay!" he begged. "Have I heard aright? Achmet-ibn-Muros is to attack Nerak?"

"That is the plan. And Saladin will be

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with him. He was eager for the task. 'If my own grandson can not hold his father's fief, then, certes, his enemy shall not,' he said. But Sinan intends that you shall be lord of Nerak, and Saladin hath undertaken agreement with him concerning this. On these terms only will they relinquish the hold."

"Aye, 'twould serve well Sinan's plots to have a puppet lord in Nerak to maintain a station of refuge for his slayers and pay him tithes on the caravan traffic!" jeered Matteo. "And Saladin will think a castle of the eastern march under a lord half-Saracen by blood should prove an excellent breach what time he bursts into the realm with fire and sword!"

He became serious.

"And when do they strike?"

"They will be in before morning dawns."

"In? How in?"

Kafur made an expressive gesture.

"I have my servants with me. At the right time we shall open the gates. You have seen the disorder which prevails. Once the gates are entered, 'twill be a massacre."

Matteo clutched him by the throat.

"If you do so," he whispered with venomous intent, "I will slay you by torment! There is one here in Nerak, who—I tell you if she dies or if harm comes to her, I will go into Massiaf and slay Sinan with my own hands! Now, answer me—lest I slay you, as I have said—has your master planned this series of atrocious crimes in real intent to profit me?"

"Aye, lord, 'tis so."

Kafur's brown face was perplexed.

"Will you do as I direct?"

Kafur hesitated, then assented.

"But how shall I be sure of you?" objected Matteo, recalling the fanaticism of the followers of the Lord of Death.

Kafur touched the ring of Sinan on Matteo's finger.

"I swear by the ring," he said.

Matteo released him, and stepped back.

"So far I am content. Look you, Kafur, your lord's plan was impossible because he—and Achmet-ibn-Muros and Saladin, as well—forgot that I might not agree to play the game in their interests. I will be no man's puppet. I am my own man."

"I hear, lord," replied Kafur. "But what is to be done? The ball hath been set rolling."

Matteo reflected rapidly, while the strains of hilarious music and gusts of laughter echoed from the floor below.

"The lord of Nerak is my enemy, as you know," he decided. "He would not take my warning seriously. In any case, he would seize the opportunity to slay me. I must ride to Jerusalem for aid. In the mean time—can you get word from the castle to your Saracen allies that they must give up hope of a surprize and lay siege in regular fashion?"

"It would do no good if I did, lord," returned Kafur. "They are wolves hot after a rich prey. Nay, but what I can do is to contrive to warn these fools in time to safeguard themselves."

"Do that, then, and I will ride at once."

"Best make speed," advised Kafur impartially. "Saladin comes with all his host, remember. Achmet-ibn-Muros rides for personal vengeance, and his lust may be appeased. But Saladin regards Nerak as the keyhole of the kingdom, and he will fight your people so long as he hath an arrow or a spear. If your aid is delayed you will find Nerak a heap of ruins—for the second time."

"And if I do," said Matteo evenly, "none other than Sinan shall pay for it. But a truce to threats. Kafur, I think you are honest, for all your evil trade. I have said there is one here whose safety means all to me. She is the Lady Brygas. I had meant to escape with her tomorrow—too late, it seems. Will you have her in your special charge? Guard her as a jewel. If by any chance the castle falls, save her if you can, slay her, if you must. Get word to her I have left her to fetch aid."

A whimsical light played in Kafur's eyes.

"In sooth, lord, I am not accustomed to playing the Christian knight," he answered. "But what I may do for her I will. And now you must be off. Already the Saracen prickers will be stealing in from the desert."

They left the minstrels' gallery together as the revels in the great hall were breaking up. The hour was waxing toward midnight and the castle's portcullis was still raised, the drawbridge still down. Those of the garrison who were not drinking or drunk in their quarters were watching various groups of performers or entertainers in the courtyard of the Outer Ward.

As Matteo swung into El-Manzur's saddle, the doors of the great hall spewed forth the members of Bomba's troupe, the

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erstwhile Florentine and Manasses de Chappes in the lead, with Misito skipping ahead of them in rôle of herald.

"Way! Way for their most potent lordships of Nerak and Misrule!" he clamored. "What? Who is this who leaves us?"

"Doth one abandon the revels while yet our lordships are a-reveling?" roared Bomba. "Out upon the knave!"

"Who is it?" demanded Manasses, gravely intoxicated. "We must constrain the rogue. Put him—deepest dungeon."

Matteo hesitated, hoping their attention might be diverted. But Bomba swaggered over to him, waving a wine-cup.

"By the wounds of St. Anthony, 'tis the discoverer of my voice!" he shouted. "Ho, Gerard, you would never leave us! Nay, gossip, it may not be."

"Nay, but it must be," returned Matteo good humoredly. "Peace! I shall return anon."

Kafur, who had been standing by Matteo's bridle, slunk hastily away. The attention of all in the courtyard was focused upon the mounted jongleur in motley. Manasses linked his arm in Bomba's and strode unsteadily beside the big Florentine.

"What — does — fellow — mean by — being sober?" hiccuped Manasses. "Must have — been — hiding — himself — tonight."

Matteo made to guide his horse around them, but Manasses, with unexpected celerity, reached out and captured his bridle.

"Not so fast, knave!" An ugly note crept into his voice. "I am master here. 'Tis for me to say who goes and who stays. What is your purpose?"

"I have an errand to do," replied Matteo, striving to disguise his voice.

But the timber of it at close range was unescapable, and Manasses peered upward, with a startled air.

"By St. Remi! 'Tis the bastard! What do you here? There is treachery! Ho, varlets of the guard! A foison of spears hither!"

Matteo whipped the little mace from its sheath at his saddle-bow.

"You wrong me," he said coolly. "I am come hither to warn you the Saracens are this moment at your gates. I must ride to muster the host."

"Like enough they are," retorted Manasses, the drunkenness scared out of him. "Ho, there at the gate—" this as his besotted retainers still failed to obey his first command—"down portcullis! Up draw!"

This time men leaped forward from every corner of the courtyard, and Matteo raised his mace to strike. But at the same moment the lines of horses haltered behind him in the open for lack of stable-room broke free in a panic that was stimulated by a blazing torch which fell from its sconce into their midst. One was burned and neighed shrilly in its pain and terror.

El-Manzur, sensing the fright which possessed his kind, reared up on his hind legs, tearing his bridle from Manasses's grasp. And Matteo brought the mace down in a blow that should have dashed the brains from Manasses's unguarded head. But Manasses jumped back and raised one arm instinctively to protect himself. Bomba, gaping at the turmoil he had created, turned to flee, and bumped the lord of Nerak aside. So when the mace descended, instead of crushing Manasses's skull, the spikes raked across his face, breaking teeth and ripping nose and lips into a hideous red mask.

"The horses will trample our lord!" shrieked a voice that Matteo identified as Kafur's as Manasses collapsed on the cobbles. "This way, men! This way!"

Matteo touched El-Manzur's side with his heels, and the bay was off before his fore-hoofs touched the ground again. The men-at-arms, who had begun to bunch about the gate, huddled forward uncertainly in response to Kafur's call. The gate wardens were running to their posts by the winches in the upper room of Baldwin's Tower whence the mechanism of portcullis and drawbridge was worked. It was now or never.

El-Manzur required no urging. The horse streaked across the courtyard like an arrow from a bow. Two men sprang to stop him and were dashed against the walls. A crossbow-bolt that sang under his belly and shivered on the stones drove him faster. In the gateway-arch Matteo turned to look behind him. The courtyard of the Outer Ward was dotted with running men. Manasses lay where he had fallen. On the steps leading up to the great hall stood Kafur, saturnine in the light of the torches.

El-Manzur's hoofs drummed under the vaulting. Ahead the prongs of the portcullis trembled—but they hovered aloft

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until he had passed through. The drawbridge was trembling on the rise, but El-Manzur spurned it underfoot and they gained the far side of the moat. More men came running from the tents and booths which were scattered between the castle and the village, and to them Matteo shouted:

"Saladin is coming! Seek safety in the castle!"

They stood open-mouthed as he passed, then ran to spread the news. He carried the alarm through the village, and no one thought to stay him. In the fields beyond he drew rein for a moment, and made sure he was not followed, smiling to himself at the confusion he had left in his track. The pursuers issuing from the castle were met by a procession of fugitives claiming that the Saracens were on their heels. Manasses was incapable of giving orders. Nobody else knew precisely what had happened. Bomba and his crew were anxious only to keep in the background. So the castle's company forgot the strange jongleur, and endeavored to untangle themselves.

Matteo settled himself comfortably in the saddle, and El-Manzur stretched into the long, swinging lope which eats up the leagues without ostensible exertion. On and on raced the powerful bay across the level ground. He barely slackened pace for the lower slopes of Mount Zorash, and took the mountain trail at a trot. At the highest point Matteo halted for one last look.

He had not had time yet to think about his own affairs. His mind had been probing the situation, ranking the facts for presentation to the king and the lords of the council. Now his reflections switched to his personal connection with the decisions which must be taken. Brygas must be saved from marriage with de Chappes. Of that there could be no doubt.

But who was to save her? He, Matteo of Antioch, son of a Saracen mother, grandson of a Saracen prince who was one of the principal scourges of the Christians, and withal, a bastard? A man without title, without lands, literally without name!

Matteo did not shrink from the self-imposed examination. What would the lords of the council say? He could see the rage with which they would repudiate his eligibility to wed with a Frankish lady, who owned in her own right broad lands in distant Brittany. He knew the resentment they would feel at the disturbance of Manasses's feudal rights of wardship. In Outremer, as in western Europe, the nobles stood out for their privileges against the power of the Crown. They would never tolerate the bestowal of Brygas upon one who was not of their order and who was tainted with the hated Saracen blood.

No, they would go to any lengths to prevent it. And as Matteo came to this point, he turned for his last look at Nerak. The castle was a cluster of lights on its shadowy cliffside, but while he looked the bale-fire kept ready on the top of the keep flared up like a rosy crown. It could mean only one thing. The aroused garrison had become aware of the approach of the armies of Saladin and Achmet-ibn-Muros.

He huddled down in his saddle, and spoke to El-Manzur.

"Now, speed, my beauty! Speed! 'Tis her life, mayhap, depends on your legs this night."

El-Manzur answered with a toss of his mane. The road was dark beneath the stars, but the bay raced as surefootedly as if it were a level field in the sunlight. Nerak disappeared on the other side of the mountain as they dropped into the descent. And Matteo resumed his thoughts.

It was at night that he had fled over this same road before. He reflected that the good fortune which had come to him had tended to dull his memory of the handicap that overset him, and must always weigh down his ambitions. He was rich, courted, feared by his enemies, but of those who courted or feared him or even those who loved him, how many, he wondered, would stand behind him if he strove for the hand of Brygas de Kergac?

So he came, by gradual processes, to the question of what was best for Brygas. She must be saved from de Chappes, of course. He kept that maxim before him as a guiding star. But how? By himself? Mayhap, yet—if by himself, would her lot be improved? Would her path through life be smoother? He forced himself to the bitter truth. No, it would be incomparably harder. She would be the wife of Matteo the jongleur, Matteo the nameless, Matteo the bastard! God, it was impossible!

He rode on, wrestling with his own soul. Many leagues of hilly road, and then the Jordan ford. The splashing water cooled his fever. El-Manzur drank sparingly,

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being a wise horse. They continued through the suburbs of Jericho, its gates fast barred, its sentries puzzled by the fantom rider who passed at such a desperate pace. Time enough to warn the city of its danger after he had reached Jerusalem.

He lifted up his face to the paling stars, and, very humbly, resigned himself to his fate. He had sung much of love, he reflected, but as John the Englishman had pointed out, of love, itself, he had known nothing. Now he knew. Yet did he? What was it? The answer came automatically. It was relinquishment of self. If he rightly loved Brygas he must give her up. Then give her up he would! But to whom? Who but François de Pugne? A brave knight, an honorable friend. Matteo shuddered, admitting to himself François as the logical choice. But, having shuddered, he resolutely set the problem aside as solved.

He rode on, past castle and village, field and stream, cleaving the awakening life of the road at terrific speed. It was still early in the forenoon when the sergeants at St. Stephen's Gate challenged him. He dashed between them, and flung over his shoulder—

"The king's business!"

Burghers and pilgrims fussily made way for him. Before the Hospital of St. John he tarried long enough to shout to the knights on duty:

"Saladin is on the eastern march! I carry the word to the king!"

Then on again through the narrow streets at reckless headlong gait until the palace gates were reached. It was Ali who ran out and took El-Manzur's bridle, who brushed the guards aside to make way for the dusty jongleur in soiled motley, who helped him to dismount.

"There is work toward, old wolf," said Matteo, limping away. "Rub down El-Manzur, feed him lightly. I must to the king."

In the anteroom, de Pugne met him, and to his eager queries Matteo answered only:

"They are not wed. The Saracens have besieged Nerak. Fetch out your mail. The host will be mustered anon."

The council was dissolving, and John the Englishman and Count Raymond met Matteo at the door of the Hall of Audience.

"Here is grave news, sire," called Count Raymond. "Messer Matteo says the Saracens are besieging Nerak."

"How know you that?" asked Baldwin.

"I was there, lord. I escaped just before the Saracens came up. To say sooth, although Saladin, himself, is there, the business hath been devised by my wicked old grandfather, Achmet-ibn-Muros."

" 'Tis a strong hold," said Baldwin doubtfully. "And certes, it must be well garrisoned with all the company attending the wedding. What were you doing at your enemy's marriage feast, Matteo?"

"I went to carry off the Lady Brygas, sire. She is beloved by my friend, Messer François de Pugne——"

"Why did he not go, himself?"

"Nay, how could he? I was disguised, yet even I——"

"Bide, bide," admonished the young king. "We are forgetting your real news."

He clapped his hands for a page.

"I will have Messer Henfrid of Toron, the marshal, summon the host. How long can we spare?"

"Not long enough to proclaim the Assize of Arms through the realm, with Saladin in the field," declared Matteo. "Ride with whatever spears you can muster, lord. Speed is everything. And if it be your will, I will ride in advance of you, and see if I may not persuade my grandfather to withdraw his host. He fancies he fights in this bicker for my interest, and God knows he is far astray in that thought."

"But will he listen to you?" objected Baldwin.

"He owes me more than one debt that weighs heavy on his conscience," said Matteo grimly. "Belike he will."

"You are not too wearied?"

"Nay, lord. By evening I shall be ready. And you can not ride before then."

"Do so. Pardi! The Lady Brygas is a most fair damsel, and I would go far to serve her. As to de Chappes, I care little; but the lady and Nerak must be saved."

"Aye, sire, and—and—will you take thought to my comrade's suit for her hand? I could not carry her off in the face of the peril, and——"

"Time enough for that when we have succored Nerak," laughed Baldwin. "I hope you will do as much for me at need as you venture for de Pugne."

In the doorway John the Englishman put his hand on Matteo's shoulder.

"You are not the same youth who rode hence," he said kindly.

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Matteo eyed him gravely.

"You speak by the book, Messer John," he answered, "and you spoke by the book before."

The old jongleur tightened his grip.

"'Tis a long path you travel, dear lad," he said. "Keep honor ever on your right hand, but be not too sure it leads only to unhappiness."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TENT OF SALADIN

"SEE, the Iron Men ride forth!" cried a woman in a doorway on the Street of David, lifting up her babe.

"'Tis the king!" shouted an excited burgher.

The narrow streets of the Holy City were crowded to watch the knights ride out to battle. Jerusalem was used to such scenes. They were regular occurrences. But the people never failed to thrill to the martial spectacle, for who knew what the issue of the event might be? Sometimes the host returned victorious, with strings of captive emirs and caravans of spoil, to chant Te Deums. Sometimes a broken remnant brought word of disaster and defeat. Once even the king was taken.

From the church steps priests waved censers and scattered blessings. At the junction of the Street of David and the Via Dolorosa, the Bishop of Nazareth, erect in mail, with a miter in place of a helmet and a mace at his saddlebow instead of a sword—for, being a man of religion, he might not draw blood with a blade, although quite righteously dash out the brains of paynim foemen—sat his horse, upholding in his right hand the True Cross, itself, that very marvelous relic, which the blessed Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, had been instrumental in discovering in its hiding-place of centuries.

In its gleaming, jewel-studded golden case, it loomed aloft among the bristling spears like a mystic presence, faintly radiant, heart-warming, an appeal to the imagination. Men who were steeped in vice bowed their heads and crossed themselves with mumbled prayers. A wave of strident emotion swept the ordered ranks.

Ali Ma'akwaa, riding beside Matteo, plucked his master by the elbow.

"Messer Matteo," he whispered, "is it, in sooth——"

"So men say," answered Matteo.

"A wondrous thought," babbled Ali, half pagan that he was. "He, Himself, on—that——"

He paused, half questioning.

"Nay, I know not," said Matteo, "but I would rather believe than doubt."

"Aye, belief is best!"

Ali's teeth clicked together. Like many another there, he was ready to swear he felt the beat of angelic wings overhead.

The young king in front of them dismounted from his horse, and walked to the side of the bishop, kissing with reverent lips the golden butt of the great reliquary. A procession of clergy emerged from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, singing the special invocations set for the departure to battle of the knights of Christ, the guardians of His last resting-place on earth.

The patriarch blessed the kneeling king, and Baldwin rose lithely, heedless of the dragging weight of his hauberk.

"We go to rout the paynims, holy father!" he said. "Farewell!"

"God rides with you, fair son," replied the patriarch, pointing toward the cross. "And our prayers shall speed your cause."

Matteo vaulted from his saddle and helped the king to remount. Henfrid, the marshal, shouted an order, and the bishop of Nazareth swung into line behind the knights of the Household, the feudal levies of the neighboring sees at his back.

At the gate of St. Stephen, Matteo turned from the road momentarily to survey the column of armored men, whose lance-points, shields and hauberks shone in the light of torch and cresset, choking the Street of St. Stephen and the Via Dolorosa, reaching far back through the Street of David to the dim slopes of Mount Moriah, where the Templars were issuing from their quarters to form the rear guard. Knights of the Household, knights of the Hospital, the burghers of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside, the companies of those barons who had received the summons of the marshal, Turcoples and foot-sergeants—the power of the realm marched with the king.

"A puissant host!" commented Ali with satisfaction.

"Mayhap one-tenth as numerous as the Saracens they must meet," said Matteo.

"At the least," remarked Ali hopefully, "we have the True Cross, and no Christians have been worsted with——"

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Matteo chuckled.

"Nay, once, long years ago, the Persians captured Jerusalem, and with it the True Cross."

"Why, how could that be, Messer Matteo, when it is with us tonight?" asked Ali, respectfully skeptical.

"The Byzantine Emperor Heraclius overwhelmed the Persians and recaptured it."

"Of course," exclaimed Ali with satisfaction. "Said I not so? A Christian army must be invincible in its shadow."

"The saints send you be in the right, old wolf," rejoined Matteo, laughing, "but now 'tis time for you and me to leave this slow-moving multitude and spur on to danger. We ride with death betwixt us this night."

"Better danger than inaction," commented Ali. "But here is Messer de Pugne."

François trotted up to them.

"Messer John tells me you ride in advance of the host, Matteo," he cried. "Prithee, let me go with you."

"Nay, comrade, you would ride to death."

"Why should I be spared danger which menaces you? After all, this is my quarrel, not yours."

" 'Tis because one of us must be sure to live to guard your lady that I deny you, François. Should I perish, you will be able to save her."

"But I am her knight," insisted de Pugne. " 'Tis for me to risk the danger first."

"Not so, for you might not stand against it. I am in some sort responsible for the peril which assails her, and 'tis only I, who am grandson to Achmet-ibn-Muros, who can hope to persuade the Saracens to abandon their attack and withdraw. It may be they will slay me out of hand, but if I can win to my grandsire——"

De Pugne extended his hand.

"You are as brave a knight as ever bore lance, Matteo," he said. "Forget my ill-natured words. Did you—see her?"

"Aye, comrade."

"Said she aught of me?"

"She—we—" Matteo stirred uncomfortably—"there was opportunity for naught save discussion of a plan to aid her. Afterward I discovered the Saracens were——"

De Pugne snapped down his visor.

"She—hath given me—little ground—for hope," he said.

"Rather you than de Chappes," answered Matteo with a fire that surprized his friend.

"Aye, mayhap," agreed de Pugne uncertainly. "Well, Our Lady guide you!"

Matteo nodded to him.

"At speed!" he said curtly to Ali.

El-Manzur galloped off into the night as easily as though he had not already done a day's work within the twenty-four hours. Ali spurred his horse to keep up with the bay. But no ordinary beast could hope to equal the matchless blood of the desert. It foundered as they entered Jericho, and Matteo obtained a second from the Hospitalers to whom he delivered the king's message to raise the town levies.

Then they rode on, never drawing rein. On the farther side of Jordan they encountered frightened peasants fleeing for shelter from the Saracen raiders. An hour later, pounding over the rocky road through the western foothills of Mount Zorash, Ali's horse stumbled and fell, breaking its thigh. Matteo, far in the lead, returned in response to his servant's thin cry, to find the old Turcople standing by the beast's corpse, wiping his dagger.

"There was nothing else for it, lord," he said. "What is to do now?"

Matteo considered.

"Naught," he decided promptly. "Get you back to Jericho, Ali. Go to Messer François, tell him the road was clear so far as this. Guide the host beyond Mount Zorash, but tell them not to approach the castle until they hear from me."

"Nay, nay, I like not this new arrangement," protested Ali. "You will be alone——"

"As I have been before, old wolf," retorted Matteo affectionately. "Have done. You waste words. We are pressed for time. El-Manzur hath done all a horse may. He can not carry double."

"Oh, if it must be," grumbled the old Turcople.

"It must. Be stout of heart."

And with a wave of his hand, Matteo was off again. He was disturbed, although he had not admitted as much, for El-Manzur was beginning to show fatigue. The bay's performance was miraculous, but even his wonderful spirit was commencing to yield before the demands made upon him. His head dropped lower. Once he faltered in his stride.

"Up, lad! On!" Matteo encouraged him, and at last, remembering the magic words that Feizul-ibn-Khalid had taught him, tried them, half in doubt—

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"*Awaa lukos*," he whispered in one velvety ear.

The gallant head jerked erect, the weary limbs stretched once more in the long, faultless stride that sped the leagues away, the tired lungs breathed easier. Matteo crossed himself, suspecting forbidden witchcraft.

"But 'tis in a good cause," he muttered as El-Manzur pounded up the rough slopes of the mountain.

A fierce shout echoed from the night, and a wild mob of shrouded figures flowed around him. Naked simitars waved above his head. Dark, hook-nosed faces showed in the starshine.

"Who are you, Frank, who seek death so fast?" demanded one.

"I am Matteo of Antioch, and I ride to seek Achmet-ibn-Muros."

The Saracen chuckled.

"There is no need to seek the prince. We can slay you without his orders."

"Then shall you surely be slain," answered Matteo. "You do not recognize my name, dog. Achmet-ibn-Muros is my grandfather."

The Saracens drew away from him. The leader sheathed his blade, and salaamed.

"Pardon, lord," he begged. "I knew not you were that one. How could we see you in the darkness? If it is permitted, we will guide you to the prince."

"Have you forced the castle yet?"

"Nay, lord, it still holds out. You will be in time to lead the final attack."

So the man thought he had come to reap his vengeance! Matteo smiled to himself, and urged on the troop. There was a glow in the east as they approached the vast Saracen camp. Reliefs were going forward to the siege lines to replace the soldiers who had fought through the night. Several mounds were being raised by sappers close by the moat. A wooden tower on wheels, its sides covered with green skins, was being put together just out of range of the engines on the walls. The air was full of the sough and whine of the great stone-casting machines and the whistling of lighter missiles.

The walls of the castle were bare of figures, as was to be expected. Matteo put aside his thoughts of Brygas, and studied the leaguer. Such an army must overcome even so strong a place as Nerak if it was left undisturbed. The Saracens could afford to lose the enormous number of men who would be slain in an escalade. One furious rush, and——

His party left the castle on their right and turned off through the tents to a group of pavilions ringed about with sentries. At the first pavilion, the leader dismounted and held Matteo's stirrup.

"Follow me, lord," he directed.

But a sentry turned them back, and after a moment's consultation with the guards the leader of the scouts reported:

"The prince of Emesa is in the tent of Saladin. By your leave, we will go thither."

They traversed the clump of pavilions to the opposite end, where one of striped green-and-white canvas stood. Here, too, the guards made way for Matteo's guide as soon as his name was muttered to them. They passed through an empty compartment cluttered with weapons and armor and entered a larger chamber where three men sat on a heap of skins and rugs.

Achmet-ibn-Muros and Feizul-ibn-Khalid Matteo recognized at a glance. The third man, with clean-cut, chiseled features, the high forehead of a thinker, a delicately modeled jaw and brightly piercing eyes could be no other than the great Kurdish man-at-arms, Salah-ed-din, whom the Franks called Saladin and who was become the most powerful amongst the leaders of Islam.

Of the three, Saladin alone revealed no surprize at the intrusion of a Frank in rich court dress—Matteo had ridden unmailed to save his horse. The Kurd lounged back on the cushions, his sinewy body draped in the folds of a plain white surcoat, his gaze fixed on the intruder's face.

"Greeting, grandfather," said Matteo.

"'Tis my cousin, Matteo!" cried the youthful Feizul, darting to his side.

Achmet-ibn-Muros rose, with a light on his stern features, and waved his arm in a gesture of dismissal to Matteo's guide.

"A fair greeting, grandson!" he said. "In Allah's name, we greet you. You are come in a good hour. We are here, as no doubt you know, to right the wrong I did you. And this is the Prince Salah-ed-din of Babylon who hath joined forces with me to aid in what I seek to do for you."

"How comes it I am in Salah-ed-din's debt?" asked Matteo.

"You are not in my debt," replied Salah-din in a musical voice. "But you are of Saracen blood, and I aid you because of that fact to redress a wrong for which Christian and Moslem are alike responsible."

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"You are in no one's debt, grandson," said Achmet-ibn-Muros. " 'Tis we are in yours. So we plan to win you Nerak in recompense."

"And thereafter I should be in your debt," returned Matteo. "Or, no, grandfather, I do you injustice. Not in yours, mayhap, but certes, in Saladin's and Sinan's."

"Why, perchance that is so," agreed Saladin, caressing his beard.

"And I do not choose to be in debt to so ill-assorted a pair," continued Matteo. "As for you, grandfather, 'tis your misfortune that when you plan to aid me, you strike at one I love a blow no less shrewd than that you launched against another that you loved——"

"I know!" cried Feizul-ibn-Khalid. " 'Tis the warrior-maid who orders the men-at-arms on the walls!"

Matteo said a quick prayer. Aye, it was like her, worthy of her, to take the place of her useless cousin.

" 'Tis she," he assented.

"But we will not harm her," protested the old prince. "And after the castle is taken you shall have her."

"Nay, she is not for me. I have a friend who is worthy, and I pray that he may win her. But in any case she is not for me. You forget that I live under a curse, and that curse will be visited on those who love me and share my lot."

Saladin sat forward with his first sign of interest.

"That is what the Franks call chivalry?" he asked.

"I suppose so," answered Matteo.

"You love this damsel, yet you would give her up because you think she might find greater happiness elsewhere?"

"Even so."

Saladin sank back on the divan.

"By Allah, that is a man's faith!" he swore. "I think well of you."

But Achmet-ibn-Muros leaned against the tent-pole, looking very tired and old.

"I do not understand," he murmured. " 'Twas in my mind to serve you."

"Grandfather, you can not serve me as you had planned. I think, mayhap, the curse that was upon my father and mother hath fallen likewise upon you."

"It may be," agreed the old man dispiritedly. "My eyes grow weak. I do not see the way so clearly—ah, well, what is it that you wish? My debt is great. Aye, life, itself."

"Withdraw from Nerak, grandfather. The Franks will be here anon."

Achmet-ibn-Muros straightened up. His eyes flashed fire.

"What! Flee from the Franks after a life of battle! Boy, you ask too much."

"Nay, old friend," interceded Saladin. "He asks no more than he hath a right to. You launched this venture in his service. He tells you it harms him. You may not do otherwise than withdraw."

Matteo turned eagerly to the Kurd.

"And you, too, lord? You will withdraw before the host——"

"Not so," denied Saladin. "What is fit for the prince of Emesa is not fit for me. I came hither to aid you, but I sought to further my people's cause in so doing. You were half-Saracen in blood. I would have made you the master of the desert march. But I see you are more Frank than Saracen, whatever you or your enemies may think. Therefore I respect you, but I am finished with you. And if I can take Nerak I will keep it for myself or destroy it again."

Matteo was conscious of an overpowering weariness.

"Aye, the Franks are my people. My lot is cast with them. Yet see my plight. If there is a battle, they will hold me responsible for it. If they are beaten, men will say: 'Ha, Matteo, the jongleur, was grandson to the Saracen prince of Emesa! He betrayed the host.' "

"Then get you out of this land to some place where your parentage may not be held against you," spoke up Saladin kindly. " 'Tis as you say. I would take joy to have you ride with me, but——"

"Come with us, grandson!" pleaded Achmet-ibn-Muros. "We are your people; my blood is in your veins. I will make you great amongst us. None shall hold it against you that you have lived with the Franks. There are brave days coming for Islam."

"That is the truth," said Saladin.

"Come, cousin," cried Feizul. "Bring this maiden with you. If she love you, she will turn Saracen for you!"

"You waste time, friends," declared Saladin, rising. "You deal with a man who is a Frank in thought. His honor will not permit him to do these things. He is true to his honor. Therefore he is a great man. Therefore I honor him, and so do you. His

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ways are not our ways, yet we may admit them to be good ways. And know, Frank, that because we are men of honor after the habits of our own people, Achmet-ibn-Muros, for the first time, will turn his back on an enemy, and Salah-ed-din Yussuf will cheerfully let him go and abide here to meet your king and his host with the sons of Babylon—and you, after rest and refreshment, shall go forth to your people and bid them strive their best against the spears of Salah-ed-din."

Matteo bowed his head.

"Certes, lord, that was knightly spoken."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SPLENDID BATTLE

ALL of that day and the next night Matteo slept, for he was exhausted. At dawn he was aroused by his cousin, Feizul-ibn-Khalid.

"Why is it so silent?" asked Matteo as he yawned awake.

"Our people from Emesa have already departed, and Salah-ed-din hath commanded his men to abandon the siege. He would not risk injury to your lady. If he defeats the Frankish host he will have leisure enough to take Nerak."

"He is a generous foe."

"Aye," said Feizul shyly, "we Saracens are not so evil as our enemies pretend."

"Saracen and Frank, there is little to choose between them in matters of evil," answered Matteo. "Men are men, whatsoever their race."

"You say sooth, cousin, but we have no time for debate. Our horses are saddled. Achmet-ibn-Muros and I ride by the desert track back to Emesa. You ride with Salah-ed-din's herald to the Franks who have bided the rising sun on Mount Zorash. 'Tis time to say farewell."

Matteo walked beside him from the pavilion. Outside Achmet-ibn-Muros and Saladin awaited them, already in the saddle. A groom held the bridle of El-Manzur, the bay none the worse for his exploits. Matteo pointed to the inked fetlocks.

"Did you recognize your gift, cousin?" he asked. "Without him I had not reached you in time."

"I am glad you have had one gift from Emesa which was of use," replied Feizul simply. "May Allah guard you! Remember, I shall always stand your friend."

Achmet-ibn-Muros looked long into Matteo's eyes.

"Farewell, grandson," he said with a sigh. "I am old, and I shall not see you again. But we in Emesa will not forget you, and if ever you grow tired of Frankish ways, you shall have a welcome from us."

"I thank you, grandfather," answered Matteo. "I think you have done as much as a man may to make amends for the past. Go in God's grace!"

Achmet-ibn-Muros gathered up his reins and rode away, with Feizul-ibn-Khalid and his emirs at his back. Far ahead of him out in the desert hovered a cloud of dust that was his unbeaten army, now in retreat before an enemy it had not met.

Matteo turned to Saladin, whose keen eyes met his with a hint of a smile.

"Lord," he said, "I owe you thanks for generous courtesy. Prithee, can I recompense you?"

"Nay, save it be to tell the Franks that Saladin honors them for their good deeds, and will strive always to repay them in their own coin—for good or ill."

For the first time Matteo looked at the walls of Nerak, now dotted thickly with spectators of the impending battle.

"If—if—your people win the day, lord, will—will you——"

"I will protect your lady as though she were my daughter," replied Saladin swiftly. "I have given orders throughout my host that no bowman is to aim a shaft against her. Fear not. But my herald awaits you, and you must ride. Tell your king we shall endeavor to give him opposition worthy of his knights."

"I will tell him he confronts a foeman who is as worthy as any knight in Christendom!" exclaimed Matteo.

He sprang into his saddle, and with the herald attending him, rode through the camp and the loosely ordered ranks of the Saracens. The nearer slopes of Mount Zorash were crowded with the Frankish chivalry. Long columns of knights and men-at-arms were winding through the fields, and clouds of Turcoples and foot-sergeants were forming in support of the Iron Men. Midway of the two hosts a troop of knights galloped out to meet him, and Matteo was hailed with a glad shout by de Pugne.

"Is she safe? Have you seen her?"

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"Nay," laughed Matteo, "but the Saracens have, and they say no harm hath come to her. Do your devoir today, François. She will be watching you from the walls."

"So shall I, by Our Lady's grace! But haste you to the king!"

Baldwin sat his horse in the midst of the host surrounded by his knights and barons. The Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital frowned at Matteo and his Saracen companion. Henfrid, the marshal, Count Joscelin the Grand Seneschal, Count Raymond, John the Englishman and others gave him smiling greeting.

"Thanks to Our Lord Jesus you are safe!" ejaculated the young king. "Who rides with you?"

"The herald of Prince Saladin, sire. Saladin hath given me gentle treatment and offered no opposition to my urgings upon the Prince of Emesa to withdraw from the siege."

"Of your mission we will hear anon," said Baldwin. "Messer herald," he continued in the Arabic which was second nature to him, "we greet you fairly for that you are the emissary of a brave enemy. Prithee, discharge your errand."

The herald, a grave, bearded emir of middle age, salaamed gracefully.

"Saladin greets by me the young king of the Franks," he said. "And the Lord of Babylon is persuaded the son of so famous a father must be no less valiant and wise. But three messages he hath charged me with:

"First, Saladin saith that he hath suspended the siege of Nerak. Let the castle be the trophy of the victorious host.

"Second, he tenders you grace for that your envoy, Messer Matteo of Antioch, is such a man of honor as Saladin delights equally with you to honor.

"Third, he bids you defiance and invites you to break spears with him here to decide whether Frank or Saracen shall hold the holy places of Jerusalem, for he would have you remember that Jerusalem is no less holy in Moslem eyes than in Christian."

"Say to Saladin," returned the king, "that Baldwin of Jerusalem counts himself fortunate to have against him the best warrior of the Saracens; that he is content to abide the issue of battle; that Messer Matteo is very dear to him and he joys to think Saladin hath a keen eye for honor; that he and all his host will trust in their God and fight without fear this day."

The herald salaamed again, and in company with de Pugne and other knights rode forth from the host.

"Is it true that Achmet-ibn-Muros hath departed?" asked the king, of Matteo.

"Aye, lord, he is gone."

"But not too far," interrupted the master of the Templars, pointing toward the dust-clouds in the desert.

"Certes, lord, he might not retreat without stirring the sand," answered Matteo.

"I like it not," insisted the Templar gruffly. "Here is too much of Saracen guile. This Messer Matteo, who is grandson to this prince of Emesa, sojourns in the Saracen camp for a day and a night, and what transpires there we know not. But afterward Messer Matteo returns to us, with a herald of Saladin, and the two tell the same story. Why? So that we may be sure to credit it?"

"You talk as ill becomes your rank," said Baldwin severely. "Forget private hatred and think on the good of the realm. Achmet-ibn-Muros is out of reach. If we close with the enemy he is helpless to aid them."

"But should we close with them?" spoke up one of the foreign lords of the "Adventurers" faction. "Let us stay where we are, and await the onset of the paynims."

Count Raymond of Tripoli shook his head vigorously.

"Nay, to do so would be foolish!" he said. "We must force the issue. We must smash the Saracens. So have we won every battle that was not lost by other means since our fathers came into the land."

"And now is the opportunity for the blow," cried Matteo. "Behold, lords, Saladin thinks we are not prepared and shifts his array."

The Saracens had begun to stretch in a wide arc across the front of the Christian host, reaching out tenuous horns of swirling horsemen upon either flank. They held the valley beneath the castle crag of Nerak. The Christians were on higher ground under Mount Zorash. The ground sloped gently from the Christian position to the line held by the Saracens.

The center of Saladin's host was composed of a dense block of footmen, fronted by mailed horse. Light-armed horse-archers roamed in every direction, ready to pounce upon the Christians in flank or rear, once they showed indecision or a tendency to disorder. Behind the enemy's center

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an immense band of mailed horsemen in yellow surcoats were winding across the valley to a position on his left wing. It was this movement which Matteo had descried.

"They are the Mamelukes, the guards of the Soldan of Babylon," said Henfrid, the marshal.

"Whoever they are, for the nonce they are out of the enemy's battle," insisted Matteo. "Let us fall upon the center and make shift to split their array."

"Aye, and be caught by his overwhelming numbers on the valley floor," jeered the master of the Temple.

"Well spoken!" called a number of the "Adventurers."

"Nay, I think Messer Matteo hath the right of it," said Baldwin thoughtfully. "How say you, Cousin Raymond?"

" 'Tis a sound plan of battle," declared the count of Tripoli.

"By such a device did your grandfather defeat the paynims before Gaza," reminded John the Englishman. "The Saracens can never stand up to our knights. Crush their footmen, and we may dispose of the Mamelukes later."

"Lord marshal, what is your judgment?" Baldwin appealed to the baron who was leader of the kingdom's chivalry in the field.

"It should be done," said Henfrid of Toron. "Lords, prithee seek your posts. Press not the charge until the trumpet sounds. And when the recall is blown retire to shelter of the footmen. I would have you bear in mind that we have always succeeded when we fight, footmen and knights together. One without the other will fail."

Dissensions forgotten, the group of barons disintegrated. Baldwin was left alone with his Household and the company of the bishop of Nazareth, guardians of the True Cross. They had post in the center of the host between two great masses of footmen and archers. The left flank of one mass of foot was protected by the Templars; the right wing of the other mass was protected by the Hospitalers. In rear of the foot, and so disposed that they could debouch between the two masses or follow either the Templars or Hospitalers on the two wings, were the mounted companies of the barons. In front, behind and on both flanks were screens of Turcoples.

Baldwin took his helmet from a page, and fastened it to his hauberk.

"Forward, lords!" he cried, standing in his stirrups. "Christ and the Sepulcher!"

The battle-cry which had resounded over so many bitter fields was taken up by the host. Knights, men-at-arms and footmen advanced at a foot-pace. The Turcoples galloped ahead. From the Saracen ranks came an answering cry, shrill and taunting. The wings drew in somewhat, but the yellow-coated Mamelukes continued their serpentine progress toward the left of the position.

"Hither, Matteo!" called the king, and Matteo, followed by Ali, rode up to Baldwin's shield-arm.

John the Englishman and de Pugne pressed to his other side. The bishop of Nazareth, the tall, golden reliquary lashed to his left arm, brandished his mace and tried to urge his charger into the front rank.

They left the upper slopes of the hillside and reached the valley floor. The Turcoples, after exchanging arrow-flights with the Saracen horse-bowmen, retired to the rear. Stray arrows dropped in the ranks of the host. A footman threw up his arms and coughed to death. But Henfrid maintained the same slow, even progress.

The arrows began to fall in a hail, and now the marshal tossed his lance in air.

"Ho, heralds!" he cried. "Sound trumpets!"

The footmen stood fast in their ranks. The knights and men-at-arms put their horses to the gallop, spears fell in tiers and the ranks drew closer. Three columns of armored chivalry burst from the Christian formation upon the Saracen center. From between the two masses of Christian footmen came one headed by the king and the Household. From left and right drove in two others, led by Templars and Hospitalers.

Swifter and swifter grew the pace. Arrows hissed into shields and surcoats. Wounded horses screamed and plunged. Here and there men crashed to earth with a muffled clang that was lost in the growing battle's roar. For Matteo there was one moment of crouching, hostile figures, a score of whom seemed to be leveling lances at him. Then his horse rode over an Arab barb, his spear pierced the meshes of a hauberk and was twisted from his hand by the impetus of his own rush. The column overrode the thin line of mailed Saracen horse and crushed through the huddled foot behind them like an ax in soft wood.

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There were a few moments of furious fighting at close quarters, but the discipline and weight of the Franks told against sheer numbers, and the Saracen foot commenced to flee. Isolated parties of knights set off in pursuit, but Henfrid, the marshal, recalled them.

"Retire, messers!" he shouted. "The battle is only begun."

Indeed, on the Christians' right the Mamelukes were already in action, pushing back the Hospitalers upon the foot, who had taken up a position on a shallow plateau, elevated a few score feet above the surface of the valley. Far on the left, too, waved the yellow banner of Saladin, where he wrought furiously to turn the tide that flowed against him, and mustered a fresh horde of horse and foot to outflank the Templars.

Back drifted the Christian chivalry and found shelter behind their foot and archers on the plateau. The retreat was just in time, for the Mamelukes were charging in a tumultuous wave of yellow horsemen, iron men, themselves, fearless, cunning and excellently trained. They smashed the Hospitalers, dispersed the company of Count Balian of Ibelin and sliced off a corner of the right battalion of foot. Messengers came hurrying to Henfrid, the marshal, for aid in stopping the slaughter.

He quickly surveyed the field.

"Forward again, messers!" he cried. "We must strike this blow at speed, and be prepared for Saladin, himself."

The Bishop of Nazareth forced his way into the van, so that the gold-encased True Cross shone beside King Baldwin's helm. The ranks stiffened. The ponderous warhorses lumbered once more into a gallop. The ground sloped away before them, and they gathered momentum at every stride.

They struck the Mamelukes in the flank, well below the point of contact with the demoralized right wing. Saladin's yellow guards met the attack stanchly, abandoning the conflict with the Christian right and concentrating all their efforts to beat off the king's column. Their rear came up at a gallop, and in the collision men and horses were pitched in air like wreckage heaved up by a tidal wave. But the Christian wave lapped and rolled over, and the Mamelukes were torn to pieces. And then, when the victory seemed won, Saladin loosed a tempest of horse-archers, who took advantage of the confusion to drive back the king's column with heavy loss.

Nor was this the sum of the disaster, for on the left Saladin in person, fighting with vigor and daring, had hammered the Templars to pulp and sent the left battalion of foot reeling back upon the right battalion. The Christians were falling into disorder. Men were dying under the hoofs of their own horse. In rear of the Christian position hovered the clouds of horse-archers interposing a barrier between the host and Jerusalem.

"Now, are we sore pressed, lord!" groaned Henfrid, the marshal.

Baldwin raised his vizor, so that he might better survey the field.

"In sooth," he said cheerfully, "we are in such bad case that it can not become worse. Messer de Pugne, prithee, search out the master of the Hospital and bid him follow me with all the knights he can gather. Lord Bishop, display the True Cross, so that our people may take heart to die beneath the instrument of Monseigneur Christ's passion. Matteo, perchance a song will stiffen hearts that have no hope of heaven. Now, forward, messers! Christ and the Sepulcher!"

The Bishop of Nazareth, with his dripping mace, unlashed the reliquary and held it high in air like a banner. Knights and common men crossed themselves and prayed. And Matteo rode forward of the host and drummed on his shield with steel-gloved fingers.

"Christ's Kingdom is at stake, messers," the jongleur called in his mellow voice that echoed above the rack and roar of the hard-pitched fray on the left. "'Tis for us to save it. So I ask you in this moment to recall 'The Lay of the Knight's Creed,' which I made for you when there was peace in the land:

"Three things doth a brave knight need,
A sword, a spear and a trusty steed.
But no knightly rider stains his shield
In the close-barred lists of the jousting-field.
Nay, nay, Messers, he saves his blows
For the Saracens who are Lord Jesus' foes!"

The mystical properties of the holiest relic in all Christendom and the martial fervor of the jongleur's song put fresh heart into men whose sword-arms ached with weariness. The armored ranks were reformed. The remnants of the Hospitalers galloped into position in the rear.

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"Christ and the Sepulcher!"

The battle-cry thundered aloft, and battered Templars and knights of the eastern fiefs and burghers of Jerusalem and Jericho found encouragement in its promise of aid for their slackening efforts to stay the onslaught of Saladin.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE JUDGMENT OF THE KING

THE Christian foot had become an inchoate mass, bristling feebly with spears, spewing sporadic volleys of arrows, but harried and pounded from three sides by the Saracens, who themselves had lost all semblance of order and were simply milling around their prey.

Baldwin's column of knights, led by bishop and jongleur, bore around the right flank of the foot, dipped over the edge of the plateau, and taking advantage of the descent, struck down-hill at the disorganized paynims. That close-packed spear-head of mailed men and broad-flanked horses cut clear through the Saracen ranks, swerved to the left and caught in rear the body which, under Saladin's personal command, was overwhelming the dwindling Templars. The Saracen army melted away before the desperate strength of the blow. The dazed Christian foot recovered their wits, and moved forward, cheering with renewed zeal.

All along the line the Saracens commenced to flee. Saladin's yellow flag waved for a moment above a small knot of warriors, but almost instantly it was in flight again. The valley was covered with pelting fugitives, who only stayed their retreat when they must fight to win release from the nagging pursuit of the Turcoples.

Baldwin halted his column in front of Nerak.

"By God's Wounds, that was a fight!" he proclaimed, waving a bloodied sword.

"A right splendid battle," cried John the Englishman.

"There is honor for all, but chiefly for our king," said Henfrid, the marshal. "Certes, he hath displayed the valor of his father and of all those who bore his name before him."

"Baldwin! Baldwin! Baldwin!" shouted knights and barons, torn pennons and soiled blades tossing above them.

"But see!" exclaimed François de Pugne, who had given scant attention to his comrades. "The castle drawbridge is coming down."

"'Tis so," agreed the king. "Prithee, messers, doff your helms and we will make entry into this hard-pressed hold."

He marshaled the ranks, himself, and when Matteo would have dropped back to the rear called him forth and stationed him on his left hand.

"My cousin of Tripoli on my right," he directed. "Next him Messer Henfrid. On my left the king's jongleur, and Messer John. De Pugne, you are my esquire. Forward, messers. Heralds, sound trumpets!"

Their surcoats rent and torn and splashed with blood, their armor hacked and rusty, some of them reeling in their saddles with untended wounds, the knights of the kingdom rode in proud array over the drawbridge and under the gateway arch of Baldwin's Tower and so into the outer ward of Nerak—and in the very first rank, with the king, rode Matteo, who had fled the place only a few hours past.

The garrison yelled themselves hoarse with joy, for few had expected salvation from the Saracen host. On the steps of the great hall stood Milo de Planci and many another baron of the "Adventurers' " faction, with ladies not a few. But first of all was Brygas de Kergac. Matteo's heart gave a bound when he saw her, a light hauberk drawn over her gown, an open helm crowning her fair head. She stood at the foot of the steps, and waved a sword with the best of the knights and men-at-arms.

It was to her Baldwin addressed himself, but she had eyes only for Matteo, Matteo whose face was dead white and pinched, and who tried miserably not to seem to see her, while François de Pugne fussed with his bridle and grew redder and redder as he perceived that his lady had not a glance to spare him.

"Ho, Lady Brygas," cried Baldwin boyishly, "methinks there was no need for us to strive so mightily. So valiant a warrior maid as yourself would never have been compelled to yield."

"Nay, lord king," she laughed. "But, certes, we had no thought that you could come at such short notice or prevail against so vast a host. Why, some of them fled without awaiting your onset!"

"For all that you must thank Messer

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Matteo," returned the king. " 'Twas he brought us news of your plight, and he, too, who rode on ahead of the host and persuaded Achmet-ibn-Muros to withdraw from Saladin's support."

A soft light glowed in Brygas's eyes.

"Oh, sire, I joy to hear your words!" she exclaimed. "There hath been much said here against Messer Matteo. But I knew he was true to the land. A tumbler of Venice told me he had discovered the Saracens were coming and was gone for aid. But then Messer de Chappes——"

There was a commotion on the steps, and a terrible figure, its face swathed in bloody bandages, forced its way to the front.

"Aye, de Chappes!" it mimicked. "Lord king, I cry you justice! You see what hath befallen me. I am——"

"You were wounded on the walls?" asked Baldwin gravely.

"Nay, lord, that false, perjured hound, who rides at your left hand, the bastard who calls himself the jongleur of Antioch——"

Baldwin raised his hand for silence.

"Have done, Messer de Chappes," he said. "This is no place for such a scene. Usher us into the hall, and justice shall be done."

Matteo dismounted with the others of the king's company, aware of the curious looks which were cast at him, the murmurs exchanged behind his back. De Pugne hurried up to him.

"I know not what the dog means, Matteo," he said, "but in any case I am with you."

Matteo felt a hand on his arm, and turned to look into the face of Brygas.

"You have not said a word to me!" she reproached him. "But I do you a wrong! 'Tis I who should be down on my knees vouchsafing my thanks to you. Oh Matteo, Matteo, you——"

"Nay, nay, lady, you are overstressed," Matteo interrupted gently. "I have done little enough. But I must answer my enemy within. Behold, here is Messer de Pugne, who hath much to say to you and is the best knight of Outremer and your dear friend."

She gave him a strange look.

"Why must you talk of Messer de Pugne who is here to talk for himself? Well, be at your ease. I shall not annoy you."

John the Englishman was awaiting Matteo on the top step.

"This comes in a bad hour, lad," said the old jongleur.

"It had to come," replied Matteo. "Better now than later."

"Aye, but the lords are hot from battle. Some of our best supporters are slain or sick of wounds. The Templars and the Hospitalers are mad for the losses they have suffered. How can we have cool counsel in such a moment?"

Matteo shrugged his shoulders.

"I grow weary of my load," he answered. "Perchance it will be reduced."

"Not while I live," said John kindly. "Now, do you keep your temper, and remember the king is your friend."

Baldwin sat on the dais, where Matteo remembered to have seen his father and mother sit the last night in the Nerak of his boyhood. De Chappes stood before him, with de Planci and other foreign lords. The lords of the host were grouped at the king's back.

"Here, Matteo," summoned the king. "Messer de Chappes charges that you struck him in his own courtyard, having entered his castle in disguise. Of this I know a part to be true, but——"

" 'Tis all true, lord," replied Matteo. "I could not have entered Nerak save in disguise, and when I sought to leave it to carry word to you of the danger——"

"Aye, but how knew you the Saracens were coming?" taunted de Chappes. "By St. Remi, you could not have known save you had intercourse with them! Did you not plot to deliver up the castle, aye, and the king and all his host? I'll swear he did, lords!"

"But Nerak is saved, the host is victorious and I am here," objected the king.

"His plans miscarried," retorted Manasses swiftly. "Oh, he labored carefully, sire, doubt it not. He was ignorant there were dissensions in Saladin's ranks and that nigh half the Saracens would abandon the struggle."

"Now do you show how impotent is your venomous hate," said Baldwin. "The troops of Achmet-ibn-Muros retired at Messer Matteo's solicitation."

"Aye, because Achmet-ibn-Muros is his grandfather," cried Manasses undismayed. "And so you have a fresh, unbeaten Saracen host within reach of the march, ready to swoop down and annihilate you at leisure—unless you are careful."

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Several lords muttered assent to this warning. Matteo stepped to the front of the dais.

"Lord king," he said, "where there is so much of evil 'tis best to tell the whole truth. For what happened I am responsible."

"Aye, and for my father's murder, too!" shouted Manasses.

"For that, too," admitted Matteo steadily, "although 'twas not done with my will or by my order."

"Not so, Matteo!" exclaimed John the Englishman.

"You know not what you say," cried de Pugne.

"Are you in earnest?" questioned the young king, and his voice was very solemn.

"Earnest and anxious to answer my enemies, once and for all," replied Matteo.

And he told in a few words the plot the details of which he had wrung from Kafur.

"Do you see that man hereabouts—the one dressed as an Italian tumbler?" demanded the king.

"Nay, lord, and you may be sure he is gone hence. He is an apt knave. 'Twas he warned the Lady Brygas of my departure——"

"Ho, so you journeyed hither to meet her, did you?" snarled de Chappes. "Lords, I learn more of the interest this knave hath in my affairs. I had hoped to bid you all tarry for my marriage, but——"

"'Tis of that marriage I now speak," broke in Matteo. "I came to Nerak, lord king, as I have told you, to carry hence the Lady Brygas, who is beloved by my friend, Messer de Pugne."

"Where is he?" rasped de Chappes. "I'll have his heart out! Ho, varlets, there, fetch me——"

"Have done," admonished Baldwin sternly. "Messer de Chappes, you are overbold. Messer de Pugne is of my household."

"But she is my betrothed, plighted to me in wardship by my father. Aye, she was his niece!"

"Prithee, sire, have the lady in," suggested Matteo.

John the Englishman slipped from the hall at a nod from Baldwin, and returned with Brygas and de Pugne, the latter very sheepish and downcast.

"Lords, I appeal to the feudal law," protested de Chappes. "What right hath any one, however high he be, to come between a baron and his ward, a lover and his betrothed?"

"You forget where you stand," said Count Raymond.

"In my own castle hall," boasted Manasses.

"Given to you by your king!"

"Have done, have done," Baldwin rebuked them both sharply. "Is the maid to have naught to say in this?"

"I leave it to the maid," said Matteo. "I came hither, lords, on my comrade's account——"

He met Brygas's eyes, and his voice failed him.

"A likely tale!" jeered de Chappes.

"Who else might have succeeded as I did?" continued Matteo. "De Pugne would never have won entrance to the castle——"

"To which he had no right of admittance," insisted de Chappes.

"And in the end, lords," Matteo concluded, "'tis not what I say that governs the issue. 'Tis the maid's choice."

"Maids have no choice," growled a grizzled old baron.

"Nay, nay, what talk is this?" spoke up John the Englishman in his gentle old voice. "I beseech you, lords, consider this is no issue of musty feudal law, but dealeth with the happiness of a maid. Shall she be happy or shall she not? Look upon Messer de Chappes—" the gentle voice was suddenly merciless—"is he fair in maiden eyes?"

Most of the men there in the hall, albeit hardened to war, shuddered at the fearful mask of a face that showed through the bandages. Nose there was next to none. Lips were torn and slashed, cheeks in a whorl.

"Put the question to the maid," proposed Count Raymond.

Baldwin turned to her kindly.

"Lady Brygas," he said, "there is some talk whether you are plighted in fairness to Messer de Chappes. Do you, in sooth, love him?"

Brygas lifted high her head, with its mesh of golden hair falling from under the helmet's rim.

"From childhood I despised him, lord, and now I do hate him."

"Hate him?"

"Aye, lord."

"You would not wed with him?"

"I will first throw myself from the battlements of Gui's Tower!" she answered. "Aye, and so I have told him."

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There was an instant of silence.

"It sticks in my mind, Messer de Chappes," said the king coldly, "that you told me before leaving Jerusalem you were hastening your marriage in response to your lady's wish?"

"Aye, lord—I—she is—I—she is bewitched!" De Chappes's voice was almost a wail. "That knave of a jongleur hath bewitched her with his Saracen charms. He hath the evil eye, and black magic to his call. Is he not a familiar of Sinan? Oh, doubt it not, lords. She doth not love Messer de Pugne. She hath no——"

"Do you not love Messer de Pugne?" asked Baldwin curiously.

She hesitated, and de Pugne leaned forward, tense, eager. Matteo beside him throbbed with sympathy in anticipation of the blow she would strike.

" 'Tis a hard question, lord," she murmured very low.

"Hard?"

"Must I hurt him?" she countered, raising candid eyes.

De Pugne squared his shoulders as though he had been hit.

"Nay, but do you—" Baldwin stumbled; he was on unfamiliar ground—"is there no knight who holds place in your heart?"

Again she raised her clear eyes to his.

"Would you strip me—here—before them all?" she asked.

The boy king's face burned red.

"The Virgin guide me, no!" he said. "I am—young—dear lady—I——"

"You are very knightly to me," she answered.

"But you must wed some one," he blurted.

"Fair lord, you press me hard," she said, and her voice pleaded.

"I know not what to say," pronounced Baldwin uncomfortably. "Certes, lords, I would do justice impartially, but I see not that Messer Matteo is shown to be in the wrong. If he feared the maid would make away with herself——"

"Aye, sire, but you forget other things!" The grand master of the Temple thrust his way forward. "I am just come from counting the slain. Nine-score brethren of the Temple, not to speak of lay-brothers, servitors, foot-sergeants and Turcoples, lie awaiting burial. And why were they slain, lords?"

He appealed to the assembled barons.

"They were slain, as you have heard, no doubt, for that the grandfather of Messer Matteo the jongleur conspired to capture Nerak for him! To all this heavy cost hath the realm been put in fruitless vengeance of his private wrongs. Why, lords, for the price in lives we have paid so that Nerak shall stay in Christian hands, we might have raised a host that would have carried the Cross to Emesa, aye, and to Massiaf, where the Old Man of the Mountain sits in his foul web, spinning death."

"You draw facts fine," commented Baldwin.

"By your leave, lord king, the master is not alone in what he says," cried Milo de Planci.

"Aye," continued the master of the Temple, pointing at Matteo. "Can we forget that this man came to us, wearing the ring of Sinan, as the accredited representative of the Lord of Death?"

"I hold neither for Messer Matteo nor Messer de Chappes, sire," spoke up the master of the Hospital. "But we may judge from what hath passed that Messer Matteo hath traffic with the enemies of the realm. 'Tis nowise fitting that one who is half Saracen in blood, whose grandfather is a Saracen prince, should hold high place by your side.

"Lord, we are the guardians of the Holy Sepulcher. We hold a trust for Christendom. We can not reckon friendship or one man's good or ill in carrying out the task."

It was seldom that the heads of the two orders agreed, and the Hospitaler's words had great effect.

"Would you have me order the slaying of Messer Matteo for what I know him to be innocent of?" demanded Baldwin. "Because I will not! After all, I am king!"

"Nay, sire, I think no man asks so much," said John the Englishman, stepping into the widening rift between king and barons. "But blood is at fever-heat today. My counsel is that you withhold judgment until we return to Jerusalem."

"Good words!" called a number of lords. " 'Tis for the king to judge! There is no need of haste!"

"No need for haste to assoil my open wounds?" mocked de Chappes.

"We will judge of your wounds and all else, Messer de Chappes, when we return to Jerusalem," decided Baldwin. "Lady Brygas, you are entrusted to the care of Messer John, who is to conduct you to

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court, where you shall be given opportunity to settle your dispute with Messer de Chappes."

Brygas bowed her head, and peered sidewise at Matteo. He refused to meet her eyes again. He dared not. And he felt, though he could not see, the hurt look that dawned in her face.

Unable altogether to ignore it, he grasped de Pugne by the elbow.

"Go to her," he whispered. "She will be glad of your company."

"Nay," said François glumly. "Hath she not denied me in public?"

"You speak like a child," chided Matteo. "What maid would admit her love before the whole court? You must fight to win any prize."

De Pugne's face brightened.

"There is truth in what you say," he agreed. "Thanks to the Virgin! That may be so. I will let her know I am always her friend. Mayhap——"

"Mayhap," repeated Matteo sourly to himself as François hurried off.

Suddenly, he noticed that he was almost alone in the great hall. The lords were following the king into the inner ward. He stared around him, old scenes, old words, old thoughts cramming into his mind. Then the horror which would always be associated with Nerak overcame him. He ran for the door and collided with Ali, who poked a cautious head inside.

"The same as ever, lord," remarked the old Turcople. "It hath an un-Christian look. There is overmuch blood soaked into these stones. What say you? Oh, aye, I am as ready to ride as you. Certes, what I say may be nonsense, but I know 'tis so, none the less."

CHAPTER XXIX

CONCERNING A FROWARD PAGE

THE young king sat in his chair of state at the head of the council board, very lonely in the high-ceiled Hall of Audience. He leaned his chin on his hand, pondering. The council had dissolved, only Matteo was with him.

"Must you really go?" he pleaded.

"Do but think, lord," answered Matteo, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "All the lords are turning against me. They have had a fright. Seldom has the realm been in greater danger than that day before Nerak. And without blame to myself, yet by the curse of my birthright, am I responsible for what happened."

"None played a better part in voiding the danger."

"What doth it matter? I am who I am. Now, I have an idea. In some sort, sire, you must yield to the lords. In doing so why can you not wring concessions from those who stirred up this 'mare's-nest?' "

"As how?" demanded Baldwin with interest.

"Touching the matter of appointment of a guardian for your person. The 'Adventurers' have vexed you overmuch. If you give in to them on this point, certes, you may refuse to abide their wishes on the score of who shall be guardian. Appoint Count Raymond, and be done with it."

"You speak wisely," agreed the king. "Indeed, Raymond hath said somewhat along this line, although he is friendly to you."

"He knows, as I know, that it is best," returned Matteo. "I have talked of it with him."

"And what else?" asked the king, after a moment's consideration.

Matteo drew a deep breath.

"It gives me pleasure to think I can fortify your position, dear lord, even by exile, but as you know, I have a friend—two friends——"

Baldwin raised his head, and bent his curiously direct, boyish glance upon Matteo's face.

"You mean the demoiselle Brygas—and de Pugne?" he interrupted.

"Aye, lord."

"But do you not love her yourself, Matteo?"

"I—I——"

"I know little of such matters," continued Baldwin, "but it hath seemed to me you strove for her as though her interest was close to your heart."

"It is, lord, it is," gasped Matteo. "Monseigneur Christ alone knows the torments I have suffered—do suffer!"

"Then why not wed her?"

"Why? A thousand reasons! Remember who and what I am! Shall I drag her down from her proud estate? Nay, lord, I would have her happy and contented, the bride of a gentle knight and a noble of equal degree. De Pugne is such."

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"But she will not be happy with him," objected the king.

"Not so, lord. What she feels now I know not. But in time—all things end—even love."

"A strange doctrine from you, Matteo, who sing so sweetly of love and its tyrannous rule," commented Baldwin gravely. "Howbeit, dear friend, 'tis no matter in which I can intercede. I would I had a dozen years added on my head, and I would be bolder. But——"

"You do well, lord," agreed Matteo hastily. "The human heart is a parlous instrument of a thousand pains. And soothly, I know what I do in this affair. I have naught to offer the lady. She is far above me. If she— But I will not speak more of it. Have I your promise to break her wardship and remove her from the hands of de Chappes?"

"I could not promise less, Matteo."

"And de Pugne? You will not give her to any one else?"

"Nay, nay," laughed the young king. "Now do you ask too much. I will not compel her to marriage with de Chappes, but neither will I compel her to marriage with any other whom she doth not favor. Let the demoiselle judge for herself."

"So be it, lord," said Matteo. "And now farewell!"

"At once?"

"If I am to go, best get it over with. Certes, I have every reason for flight. Here I have enemies and temptation to haunt me. Anywhere else might I be happier."

"Nay," cried Baldwin with feeling, "be not so bitter. Of all my friends I count you closest. Older you may be, but your heart is young like mine. Ah, Matteo, God owes you a day of happiness to come! I think you shall have it. Greatly have you suffered. Perchance greatly shall you joy in the new dawn that will come to you."

"If God wills it," assented Matteo with a crooked smile. "You have but to send, and I will come at any time, lord. You may reach me always in the care of Messer Gambaglio, the Genoese banker of Tripoli. Farewell!"

The king reached out quickly and caught his hand.

"Farewell, Matteo. Aye, you shall return, and when you do I will offer you double honors to make amends for this."

They stood eye to eye for an instant—for Baldwin was well grown and Matteo of medium height—this bright, courageous boy, with the keen, masterful brain of a statesman, and the youth whose golden voice and facile imagination had won him the half superstitious adoration of the lands of Outremer. Then Matteo swung on his heel and left the room.

In the anteroom, a blond page in brown velvet doffed his cap and stepped to Matteo's side.

"By your leave, Messer——"

"What is it?" Matteo cut him off impatiently, already suspecting the boy's errand.

"My mistress——"

"Who?"

"The Lady Brygas. She——"

"Make her due reverence from me. I am engaged. I may not——"

And Matteo fled, fearful to trust himself under her pleading eyes. By such tactics had he avoided meeting her ever since the return from Nerak.

On the stairs without he encountered de Pugne, morose and doleful.

"She will have none of me," sighed the young knight, shaking his head. "I have just now been to her, and was shown the door. Aye, she was in a rage! 'Will the fool never cease from pestering me?' I heard her say. Oh, Matteo——"

Despite himself, Matteo could not resist a laugh. It was so typical of Brygas.

"Nay, cheer yourself," he said encouragingly. "I have the king's promise she shall be taken from de Chappes——"

"Oh, there was never doubt of that. But she must have a passion for some other. She will not tolerate me."

"Be not so sure. At all events, 'tis for you to protect her, for I go this day into exile."

De Pugne forgot his own troubles.

"How so?" he cried savagely. "I will do justice on whoever hath challenged your honor."

"Then must you joust with the entire court. Nay, lad, 'tis a hopeless situation, and de Chappes and his allies have made the most of it. Now, 'tis for you to see to it they do not win back the maid, perchance force her marriage to one they favor."

De Pugne squared his jaw, and put hand to dagger.

"Fear not," he promised. "I shall mount

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vigilant guard, whether she cares or not. But for her, Matteo, I would go with you, but——"

Matteo clapped him on the shoulder.

"Here is your post, comrade, and here do you stay. 'Tis ill enough that I must go. If you are ever in doubt, take counsel with Messer John."

"Who speaks my name?"

Both turned in response to the deep voice of the Englishman.

"Ho, Matteo," he said, and a twinkle in his eye belied the melancholy smile that twisted his lips. "I am just come from the king. He saith you go hence into exile."

"And prithee, do not you offer to go with me," interjected Matteo. "I have been telling this lovelorn knight 'tis for him to stay and disappoint my enemies, and I count equally upon you, Messer John."

"I shall be here," answered the old jongleur imperturbably. "As for lovelorn knights— Humph! I have respect for a man who knows when he is lovelorn. But get you to your packing, Matteo. 'Tis no more than truth that I shall joy to see you quit of the court. That scoundrel de Chappes and his bravos are itching for a chance to knife you."

"Let him but try!" returned Matteo scornfully, and left the two on the stair.

In his room he found Ali packing saddlebags, according to previous directions.

"And whither do we go, Messer Matteo?" inquired the old Turcople, as his master laced hauberk.

"To the world's end, old wolf. To Jaffa, and thence, if we come by a galley, to Byzantium, and mayhap to the Frankish lands or eastward to the court of the Tatar Khan or Cathay. What matters it?"

"Well spoken!" applauded Ali, testing the lashings of the last bag. "We should grow stale in this place, lord. And the Greeks are a soft people—easy to ravish, they say."

It had been Matteo's thought to creep away in secret, but when Ali led El-Manzur into the palace courtyard a goodly company had assembled to cry blessings on his journey. Father William, the chancellor, thrust a holy relic—the finger-knuckle of the noble St. Ursula—into his hand; Count Raymond presented him with a letter of commendation to the Emperor Manuel at Constantinople; de Pugne gave him a husky pledge of eternal comradeship; and a score of others pressed around his horse, calling messages and promises of friendship. At the palace gate John the Englishman stepped into his path. There was a light almost of mockery on the old jongleur's face.

"Farewell, Matteo," he said. "Are you still sceptical of love?"

"Nay, lord," returned Matteo soberly. "I have had my lesson."

The Englishman's face became suddenly serious.

"Aye, you have had your lesson. And if love comes to you again let it not escape you."

A deep wave of sadness overwhelmed Matteo.

"It will not," he answered.

"Be not so sure," said John. "That which the Saracens call Fate is overkindly to some, who, mayhap, do not deserve its favors. God keep you, lad! And be sparing of your voice on the grace-notes. 'Twas never your strong point. If you fare toward Italy, study their structure of *terza rima*. It hath a wondrous pleasant flow off the tongue."

Matteo waved to him, and passed through the gate. The last link was broken. Once again he was starting forth on a new venture, alone, save for faithful Ali. But hark! What was that thunder of hoofs behind him on the cobbles of David Street? It was the blond page in brown velvet, who reined in just behind Matteo, breathless and ruddy of face under the blue hood that he had donned in place of his saucy cap.

"What now, boy?" growled Matteo disagreeably.

"Naught, messer," the page replied in a reedy treble. "My mistress charged me to see you so far as the gate. 'Perchance,' she said, 'he will yet have the courtesy to receive my message'."

"Courtesy, quotha!" rasped Matteo. "Have done with your insolence! You are unduly forward, for a page. I will unbreech you in the city street, and drub you soundly, if you speak again!"

The boy cowered in his saddle, and pulled the hood over his face. But Matteo, viewing him askance, wondered why his shoulders should be shaking—unless it was from fear. Perchance, he had been oversevere. 'Twas not the boy's fault. And should he blame Brygas because her love prompted her to watch over him by proxy until he was quit of the city? The which consideration plunged him deep in gloomy thoughts.

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He took note of nothing afterward until they were past St. Stephen's Gate. Then, of a sudden, he observed the page, still trotting a horse's length behind and to his right, parallel with Ali.

"What is this, boy?" he roared. "You said you accompanied me to the gate?"

The page huddled lower in his saddle, and reined aside.

"Answer me!" commanded Matteo.

"You — you — said you — would — unbreech me—if——"

Matteo flushed with wrathy shame.

"I spoke in heat," he acknowledged, "but have your own way."

And he rode on. They had passed the Church of St. Stephen on its hilltop, and were out of sight of the city when he turned again.

"Certes, boy, you have gone a sufficient distance," he said kindly. "Your mistress doth not wish you to wander so far afield."

Still the page made no answer.

"Would you accompany me to Jaffa?" asked Matteo in some heat.

"Aye, Messer Matteo," answered the page, and for the first time lifted eyes to his.

"Brygas!"

She kneed her horse forward.

"Did you think I would let you——"

"Messer Matteo! Messer Matteo!"

Ali's voice was vibrant with alarm.

"Out sword, lord! We are attacked!"

Matteo looked up quickly, his wits dazzled by the turn of events. A dozen men on horseback had ridden out from behind the church, and were galloping at them with swords drawn.

" 'Tis Manasses," cried Brygas the page. "I feared something like this. So I came."

"Quick!" directed Matteo. "While we hold them do you ride for the church. They would never break sanctuary for a woman."

Brygas laughed at him.

"Dear lord," she answered gently. "I would rather die with you, than live without you. Be at ease. I have a sword, and I am proud to fight for you."

She drew the little blade she wore at her belt, and ranged her horse beside his. Ali, without speaking, took his place on her other side.

Tears misted in Matteo's eyes.

"I am not worthy," he said. "But 'tis too late to do otherwise. Let us ride at them with a will. If aught befalls me, Ali, take her——"

"Aye, lord," replied Ali gruffly.

They galloped to meet the attack. De Chappes, with the horrible scars on his face freshly healed, rode in the van of their assailants.

"Three of you!" he yelped as he came up. "By the Cross, 'tis my fair cousin! The saints are kind, Brygas, you shall return to Nerak—carrying the jongleur's head."

Then the steel began to sing. The three were sorely outnumbered, yet Matteo and Ali were worth two or three men each and Brygas played her part, fending and striking and taking every advantage of the fact that her cousin's men had been instructed not to harm her.

Ali slew a man, and Matteo knocked another from his horse. A third reeled back with a slashed sword-arm at Brygas' hands. But the odds were overpowering. Matteo was protected from the blows that rained on him back and front only by the meshes of his hauberk, and 'twas a question of time when a weak link must go. Ali, adroit and skilful, had so far held off the lesser numbers who attacked him, but an unlucky stroke hewed the sword from his grasp and he was weaponless. He snatched from his saddle-bow the mace which Matteo had wielded against de Chappes, and resumed the fight undaunted.

A glad cry came from Brygas.

"Aid comes, dear lord, fight on!"

Matteo snatched a rapid glance over his shoulder. A group of men in brown habits were running from a wood on the hilltop.

"They are only palmers," he groaned. "They will never risk blows with men-at-arms."

But desperation edged his efforts. He tried frantically to reach de Chappes, who hovered outside the circle, cheering on his men and taunting the three who held it back.

"Come forward, you coward!" called Matteo. "Man to man, and I'll accept the issue!"

"I would not soil my sword on you," grinned Manasses evilly. "Nay, bastard. My servants can dispose of you. I wish I could take you alive, but I dare not the risk. Sometimes I think 'tis true you have mastered the black art——"

One of the running group of palmers had halted on the edge of the next field, and whipped a short bow from beneath his habit. He crouched, notched an arrow,

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drew cord and loosed in the twinkling of an eye.

Matteo heard a fierce whine in the air. Manasses gasped, staggered and tore at the shaft that had driven through his chest from front to back.

"——— curse—you!" he coughed as the blood welled in his throat. He was dead when his body struck the ground.

His minions gave one yell of terror, and turned and fled. But before they had rounded the shoulder of the hill a second shaft had found its mark, and the sun was flashing from the steel of a peaked helmet lying in the meadow grass.

Brygas dropped the sword from her hand, and pressed her horse against El-Manzur so that she might encircle Matteo with both arms.

"Oh, my dear, dear lord——"

"I am no lord," protested Matteo, "as I have told you before this."

"Doth not Ali call you so?"

"Oh, aye, to him, mayhap. 'Tis an old habit—and a poor one—he is too old to break."

"Always you shall be my lord," she answered softly, and her head sank on his shoulder. "And certes, how can you say you are not a lord, when two admit you one?"

Matteo smiled down at her, although he strove dutifully to frown. Then she lifted her lips—and he could not deny them. The two horses cropped the grass industriously. Finally, Ali coughed apologetically.

"Oh," said Brygas.

"What am I to do with you?" said Matteo.

"Why, even keep me," she retorted.

"Do you realize that I am a homeless wanderer——"

"And the foremost jongleur of Outremer? Aye, lord."

"—with no name to give you?"

"Name enough for me! Nay, you waste time, Matteo. I am with you, and I shall stay with you. If I must, I will be your page and carry your gittern and dance for you. If I may—" her eyes glowed to match the color in her cheeks—"I will be your wife."

Ali coughed again.

"If it please you, Messer Matteo," he said.

"What?"

"Here are—they who came to our aid."

"Reward them fittingly," ordered Matteo, engaged in assessing the exact shade of violet that gleamed in the blue of Brygas's eyes.

"But one of them—er—knows you, lord. He asks speech."

"May he burn in ——!" rejoined Matteo heartily, and abandoned the attempt. "What, knave, you are to be rewarded! What, then— Ha! God's Wounds! You again!"

Kafur, with arms meekly crossed over his spare palmer's habit, smiled shrewdly up at him.

"I grieve to cause you annoy, Messer Matteo," he said smoothly. "But 'twas in my mind you had need of a priest."

"Of a priest?"

"Of a priest."

"What have you to do with Christian priests?"

"I have to do with many things and many men—as you should know, lord. And if, as I think, you have cause to use a priest, why, here is one I have kept handy for the right moment."

And he signaled up a stout, burly fellow, who hauled missel and rosary from his robe as he advanced.

"Is he verily a priest?" demanded Brygas.

"Beyond doubt, lady—and in good standing with his bishop, albeit a loyal servant of Sinan," declared Kafur.

"What say you?" asked Matteo, turning to Brygas.

" 'Tis for you to say now, lord," she made answer, with lowered eyes.

"I say that I will not flout what Providence yields to me!" he exclaimed. "Messer priest, do what you may for a roadside marriage. Will it bind?"

"Beyond the gates of Purgatory," assured the priest.

"By St. Matthew my patron, let us on with it! Stay, draw that carrion from the road." He pointed to the bodies of de Chappes and his men. "Now, be swift!"

So the priest gabbled through the service at the roadside amidst the rapt attention of Ali and the Assassins. When he had made an end, Kafur came forward to Matteo's bridle.

"Sinan pays his debts, lord, as you will agree," he said.

"After a fashion," Matteo admitted.

His attention was fixed on Brygas. He was thinking of her as he had first seen her,

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dashing across the hills between Nerak and Mardan, hot in pursuit of this same brown, sinewy man with the searching eyes, who stood before him.

"Sinan saith by me," continued Kafur, "that his service is open to you. Bring your beloved, if——"

Matteo gathered his reins in one hand. His other was clasped tight in Brygas's.

"Nay, tell Sinan I am now a servant of love. Vengeance and hate and death I have put behind me. Henceforth I ride in the sunlight."

He bent to touch Brygas' lips once more.

"Come, sweet friend, we have far to ride."

"Whither?" she asked, laughing merrily.

He laughed in answer, and his voice soared in a snatch of song:

"Ask me not where I ride,
Ask me not where I bide.
On the horizon's rim
There lurks a forest dim,
And in its bosky dells,
Strewn thick with asphodels,
I'll find my guide."

Kafur the Assassin lingered by the wayside, listening as the song echoed back from the jongleur's lips:

"There in a castle tall,
Moss green upon a wall,
Belt starred with silver gilt,
Shagreen on sheath and hilt,
Sword Bright the faery brand
Waits for the wanderer's hand,
Ready to fall.

"When I have won the prize
I shall know truth from lies,
I shall——"

The ringing, mellow voice died away in the distance.

THE END

BY PROXY

by G. A. WELLS

Author of "The Weak Spot," "Twice for the Same Offense," etc.

HE WAS known as the "Yaqui Kid." That title connoted all that he was. He was called "Yaqui" because he was so excessively cruel and bloodthirsty. The "Kid" part of his name gave some indication of his age. He was only twenty-four. He had been begot by a renegade white father and a semi-civilized Yaqui mother. The worst of both parents developed in the offspring. It was a nasty borning.

Compared with the Yaqui Kid a rattlesnake was a harmless thing with which a child might play with perfect safety. A lie and the truth were all one to him; he used either as it best served his wicked ends. He was the personification of treachery and his promises were as empty words. He killed wantonly, deliberately, for the sheer joy of it. He possessed an insatiable lust for human blood. A devil incarnate was this spawn of an unholy marriage.

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Youth and age, male and female, a life was a life to the Yaqui Kid and he snuffed it out as suited his whim. He boasted pleasantly of seventeen notches on the handle of his six-gun.

One of his recent killings was particularly revolting and inexcusable. He had ridden into one of the line camps of a ranch near the border and shot down an old man, its only occupant, for the possession of a brier pipe. The old man would have given him the pipe as an act of comradeship, but that wasn't the Kid's way. So he killed. How did the circumstances become known? The Kid left a note pinned to the dead man's breast, telling of the deed; its cause. The effect was the lifeless body of the old man.

It was a note hard to read, consisting of a wide, rambling scrawl of misspelled, crudely fashioned words. The Yaqui Kid had very little of education. What he had he had gained while serving a sentence of one year for robbery in a New Mexico jail when he was about nineteen. The sheriff had taught him the rudiments of reading and writing to while away the time. Later the same sheriff died instantly of a bullet from the Yaqui Kid's gun.

The Yaqui Kid was inordinately proud of his accomplishment of writing. He left his mark everywhere, little cards posted here and there about the countryside to tell that he had passed that way.

But there was more than pride in his ability to write that motived his scattering his telltales about. Each epistle by the nature of its contents and its very existence was a loud guffaw, an open sneer at the law and its minions. Some of the officers he named, branding them unprintable names, daring them to come after him, promising them a soul-shocking death if they took the dare.

As concerned a deputy sheriff and a special deputy sheriff from Eagle, Eagle County, Texas, the Yaqui Kid kept his promise. He ambushed them on a mountain trail and riddled their bodies with bullets.

The trigger-finger of the special deputy, a man whom the Yaqui Kid hated with a super-hatred, was missing when the body was found on the trail with its companion body. The Yaqui Kid had hacked it off and carried it away in his pocket wrapped in a piece of buckskin for a trophy. He left a note as usual.

"i taken the ——'s fengr for god luk so he kant drop me wen i dy uv ole aig an mete him en hel cum on you —— an git me ef you kan yacky kid."

The two bodies, together with the note, were delivered to Sheriff Billy Ransom at Eagle, the county seat, in whose county the killing had taken place. The body of the special deputy was sent on to his people at San Antonio. That of the deputy was laid at rest in the Eagle cemetery.

After the funeral Sheriff Billy, accompanied by his first deputy, Tom Danton, returned to his office. He read the Yaqui Kid's note again, and when he replaced it in the drawer of his desk from whence he had taken it his eyes were shot with fire.

"Tom," he said to his deputy, "you look out for things while I'm gone."

"Where you goin', Billy?" asked the other, looking at his chief with surprize.

"Out on the trail, an' I'm goin' to stay out till I git that murderin' Yaqui Kid or he gits me."

"Well, you dog-goned old mossback!" ejaculated Danton. "Billy, you don't mean—well, I be dog-goned!"

"I shorely do mean it," declared Sheriff Billy. "These yere killin's has got to stop."

"But see here, Billy, yo're too old to go trapesin' round like that," protested Danton. "What for kind of an idjut you tryin' to make of yoreself, nohow?"

"Them last murders has made me young agin, Tom," replied Sheriff Billy solemnly. "Anyhow, you-all look how this thing's turned out. Been a hundred youngsters after that bandit, more or less, an' what've they done? Wasn't them two men he jest killed youngsters? They shorely was. They didn't do nothin', did they, 'ceptin' git theirselves killed? Which I see it's time an old head gits busy an' produces results. I figgerate I ain't lost none o' my early cunnin' even if my hair is gray. I pits my age agin this yere murderer's youth, that's all."

Danton eyed his chief intently for several long moments and finally concluded that Sheriff Billy was in dead earnest.

"All right then, Billy," the deputy surrendered. "When do we start?"

Sheriff Billy shook his head.

"As I says, Tom, you-all remains yere to tend the kittle while I'm gone," he said. "I'm takin' the trail alone this time. Crowds, seems like, sort o' messes things up. Yo're goin' to stay an' look out for the camp."

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Danton swore.

"Now you lissen to me, Billy Ransom," he said hotly. "You ain't goin' meanderin' off by yoreself after no bandit what don't think no more killin' a man than he do a rabbit. No, sir. You-all take Frank Childs or Jack Thompson or——"

"Who's boss o' this yere bailiwick, Tom Danton?" broke in Sheriff Billy fiercely.

And that settled the argument.

BRIGHT and early next morning Sheriff Billy saddled and bridled his horse, packed some grub and a blanket-roll behind the high cantle of the saddle, buckled on his six-gun, thrust a .38-Winchester rifle into the saddle scabbard, shook hands with deputy sheriff Danton and rode south out of Eagle toward the Mexican border, seventy and some odd miles away.

Late afternoon of the third day he drew up before the hut of one Miguel Delgado, an aged Mexican sheep-herder without a flock. How Miguel lived no one knew. His hut was located on the bank of a shallow stream that flowed through a wilderness of tall chaparral at the base of the Chisos mountains. The Rio Grande was eight or ten miles farther to the south.

Sheriff Billy's journey south had been halting and devious by reason of faint trail or no trail at all. Here and there he talked with people who had seen the Yaqui Kid or signs of his passing. By diligent inquiry he learned things about the Yaqui Kid that he did not before know. He meant to profit by one of the things he had learned, for it was a thing of peculiar importance.

Another of the things he learned, one of a little less importance, was that the Yaqui Kid had a sweetheart who lived with her father in a little hut in the foothills of the Chisos mountains. Her name was Benita Delgado, and she was the daughter of Miguel Delgado, the aged Mexican sheep-herder who had no flock and lived Heaven alone knew how.

For the price of ten dollars gold and a promise of secrecy Sheriff Billy had gleaned his information from a Mexican who had received great injury at the hands of the Yaqui Kid. The Kid would have done well to kill this Mexican.

From the revengeful Mexican Sheriff Billy rode straight south to the hut of Miguel Delgado. Miguel and his daughter heard the horse coming long before they could see the horse, so they were standing in the doorway of the hut when Sheriff Billy drove up. Sheriff Billy had no fear of the Yaqui Kid just then, for he knew that the Kid was in sanctuary somewhere on the other side of the Rio Grande.

"Howdy, mister," hailed Sheriff Billy.

"*Buenas tardes, señor,*" the old sheep-herder returned the greeting. "*Que quiere usted?*"

"I reckon you're tellin' me howdy do, but I can't swear to it," replied Sheriff Billy with a laugh. "Mister, I jest don't savvy yore lingo none a-tall, which you'll have to speak plain Texas talk to me."

The man and the girl exchanged a quick glance. The girl said something to her father in a low tone and he nodded. It was evident to Sheriff Billy that he was an object of suspicion and not welcome. But he had expected that to be the case.

"What do you want and who are you?" the old man then asked in perfectly good English.

"Are you Miguel Delgado?" countered Sheriff Billy.

"*Si, señor.*"

"That means 'yes, mister'; I know that much Mex anyhow," said Sheriff Billy. "Then if yo're Miguel Delgado yo're the gent I want to see."

"Who are you?"

"The sheriff o' this yere county, if you jest got to know," admitted Sheriff Billy. "An' if yo're pinin' to know why I'm yere I don't mind tellin' you I want a pow-wow with you concernin' a murderin' miscreant which he's known as the Yaqui Kid."

Sheriff Billy's right hand hovered near the butt of his six-gun when he made this admission of identity and the nature of his business. He saw father and daughter again exchange quick glances. Then they looked at him once more. The girl's black eyes glittered, giving to her face a venomous expression.

"You see, Mister Delgado, I was told up yonder," went on Sheriff Billy with a backward jerk of his head toward the north, "that the Yaqui Kid was a good friend o' yore'n, an' he was in the habit o' droppin' in on you now an' then to see yore daughter. An' seein' as how I want the Kid for all them killin's he's guilty of I figgerated this was a purty likely place to pick him up. Now what about it?"

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The old man spat angrily and the girl's eyes took on an added glitter.

"We do not know him you call the Yaqui Kid," denied the old man.

"Now don't you try to string a man as old as me, friend Miguel," said Sheriff Billy good-naturedly. "Suppose I come in an' tell you jest what my proposition is, an' mebbe we can come to some understandin' concernin' the same? It'll soon be too dark out yere to see an' there's times when I likes a light, which this is one o' them times."

Sheriff Billy did not wait for an invitation, but dismounted and, throwing the bridle reins over the horse's head to hold him and taking the rifle from its scabbard, strode toward the two in the doorway. They fell back before him and he went inside. The old man said something to the girl and she lighted an oil lamp and placed it on a table.

Sheriff Billy, keeping one eye on the man and the girl, looked about him. There were two rooms to the hut, both of them scantily furnished. Here and there showed the civilizing touch of the feminine hand.

In the room in which they were was a low bunk against one wall, two or three stools, a table and a wide fireplace in which a fire was smoldering. Sheriff Billy stepped to the doorway opening into the other room and looked in. Apparently it was the girl's room, for it was neater. There were several cheap pictures on the walls. A picture of the Virgin with a candle bracket hung beside a small dresser with a cracked mirror.

"First, how about some supper?" demanded Sheriff Billy when he had completed his survey of the hut.

He pulled some silver coins from his pocket and threw them on the table. The old man scowled darkly, nevertheless he gathered up the coins avariciously and put them in his own pocket, at the same time snapping an order in Spanish at the girl.

"Now then, mister, le's me an' you talk business," said Sheriff Billy half an hour or so later when he had eaten the supper that had been prepared for him by the girl. "An' the only kind o' business I got with you-all is about the Yaqui Kid."

The old man said nothing. As the girl cleared the dishes from the table her eyes glittered at Sheriff Billy constantly. In them was a good deal of hate and something of fear. Sheriff Billy sat on a stool with his back to the wall across from the fireplace in such a way that he could watch every move the man and his daughter made. Also, he kept his ears cocked and a wary eye upon the door. His rifle leaned against the wall beside him.

Although, according to the best reports, the Yaqui Kid was in hiding in Mexico on the other side of the Rio Grande, Benita Delgado was the sort of female that might well tempt a man of Yaqui's caliber to risk many things to be with her. She was a very pretty girl. Sheriff Billy had no absolute guarantee that the Yaqui Kid would not unexpectedly appear upon the scene to see his sweetheart, so he kept alert.

"Miguel," said Sheriff Billy, "I hear tell the Kid is loafin' somewhere in Mexico not a thousand miles from the river. Them two deputies o' mine he kills recent shorely makes good excuse for him gittin' scarce north o' the river all of a sudden. But 'cause he's hidin' in Mexico ain't no sign he ain't goin' to git ketched eventual. That's what I'm yere for, to ketch him. I reckon you-all, bein' sech good friends o' his'n, has got some way passin' the word to the Kid on short notice?"

He paused and waited for the old man to speak, but the old man merely glowered at him and Sheriff Billy continued,

"Suppose, Miguel, somebody about my size was to offer you money to pass the word for the Kid to show hisself over yere? I figgerate you-all needs some money right smart, an' I'm goin' to give you a chancet to git it. There's twenty dollars good American gold if you'll arrange to git the Yaqui Kid in this yere room before mornin'."

Sheriff Billy plucked a heavy gold coin from his vest pocket and tossed it on the floor between himself and Miguel Delgado. It jingled musically as it fell. Sheriff Billy shot the girl a swift glance. When the coin struck the floor he saw her body jerk spasmodically as though under a whip lash, and her lips came together in a thin line. She looked at the coin as she might have looked at a deadly snake. It would require more than twenty dollars to bribe the girl to betray her lover.

Sheriff Billy chuckled to himself and shifted his gaze to the old man. Miguel Delgado, apparently, was not so scrupulous and squeamish as his daughter. His eyes were fastened upon the yellow disk shimmering dully in the light there on the floor.

There was silence for a time and the

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three were motionless. Then the old sheep-herder rose to his feet from the stool where he was sitting beside the fire-place and took a step toward the gold piece. At that the girl uttered a startled, low-voiced cry.

"*Padre—basta!*" (Father—stop!)

"*Silencio!*"

The old man glared at his daughter fiercely and she cringed. He stooped, picked up the coin and thrust it into the pocket with the silver Sheriff Billy had paid for his supper.

"To me, *señor*, the Yaqui Kid is nothing," Miguel Delgado said, and snapped his fingers. "How shall it be done, *señor* sheriff?"

"Let yore girl go for him an' tell him yo're sick," answered Sheriff Billy. "Or let her tell him you busted a leg an' you want him to come an' set it. Tell him anything to git him yere."

"*Bien!* How shall she go, *señor?*"

"Can she ride?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Then let her ride."

"There is no *caballo*. We are very poor, *señor* sheriff."

"She can use my hoss. Will she have to swim the river?"

"But no, *señor*, the Kid is but on the opposite shore of the river in the hut of friends. Benita goes but to the near shore and signals him to come. Hear thou, Benita? Make ready to carry the message to the Kid."

"*No la tomare!*" (I will not take it!) the girl cried, stamping her foot.

The father frowned and advanced a step or two toward her. She backed away.

"Hear me, little one," he said in Spanish. "Think thou I would betray our friend for the gold of this pig? Nay, sweet bird. Him shall we betray instead. Go thou as thou art directed on the *señor's* horse. Signal our good friend to cross to thee. Then shalt thou tell him all—how this pig with a fool's reasoning plans to take him and deliver him up."

Sheriff Billy sat indifferently watching father and daughter, and listening with both ears wide open. His face was immobile. Yet inwardly he was chuckling to himself, for he understood every word the old man said.

Long years had Sheriff Billy Ransom spent on the border, daily rubbing elbows with Mexicans and with white men who spoke Spanish. He had himself learned the language well long before he ever heard of Miguel Delgado. He had feigned ignorance for reasons of his own.

"While thou art away, little bird of thy dead mother's own sweet body," the old sheep-herder continued, "I will drink wine with the fool, and in his wine shall be that which makes sleep. Remember, pretty bird, the little bottle of medicine our friend gave thy old father to bring sleep above the pain of his aching old legs?"

"I remember, father."

"So. He shall sleep. Dost thou ride here then with our friend, and in the chaparral he shall give to me the usual signal. If all is well a light will I show in the doorway. Then shall this pig here know that we are the friends of our friend, and our friend, thy lover, shall know. Go!"

The old man snapped the interjection like the crack of a whip and glared at the girl. She pretended great fear, much to Sheriff Billy's amusement. Throwing a scarf over her head and knotting it under her chin she slunk past her father and out into the night.

In a few moments the two men heard the rapid thudding of a horse's hoofs; then at length all was silence again. Sheriff Billy quietly drew his six-gun from its holster and threw up its black muzzle to point in the general direction of Miguel Delgado's breast. Miguel Delgado saw and instantly his face betrayed a vast astonishment.

"Set down where you got up from, Miguel," commanded Sheriff Billy.

There was no mistaking the tone of Sheriff Billy's voice or the glint in his eyes, so Miguel seated himself again upon the stool beside the fireplace.

"By the way, Miguel," said Sheriff Billy coldly, "don't let me forgit to mention to you that I understood ever' word you said to yore girl. If you don't believe it I'll repeat it to you."

And forthwith Sheriff Billy did repeat what he had heard Miguel Delgado say to his daughter. He rattled the entire conversation off word for word in border Spanish. Miguel Delgado's eyes popped with amazement and fear.

"*Por Dios! Señor*, have mercy!"

The old man clasped his hands together and looked at Sheriff Billy beseechingly.

"Now don't git all het up, Miguel," said Sheriff Billy reassuringly. "I reckon I could ventilate you-all a heap an' sleep peaceful nights same as ever. You took my money

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an' was tryin' to do for me. But it's all in a day's work, an' when I deals with friends o' the Yaqui Kid's I kind o' figgerate I'm dealin' with somethin' about thirty times as treacherous as them Injuns he's named after. I ain't played my trump card yit."

"You are not going to kill me, *señor* sheriff?" gasped the old man unbelievingly.

"Not jest yit anyway," replied Sheriff Billy. "I want to use you a bit. Miguel, they tell me yore daughter is in love with the Kid."

"Madly, *señor* sheriff, madly. He is good to her. The candy in pretty boxes does he bring to her, and the rings and the bracelets and the colored ribbons for her hair. Madly does she love him, *señor* sheriff. They are to marry in the next month."

"Now that's too bad, Miguel," said Sheriff Billy sorrowfully. "Do you happen to know a Francisco Mirelles at——"

"*Si, señor*, at the what is called Circle-Bar rancho of Señor Phillips near Dona Mesilla," burst from Miguel. "He is my wife's cousin upon whom I have not laid these eyes of mine in four years."

"That's the *hombre*. Would Francisco lie, do you reckon, Miguel?"

"*Dios!* False tales are not for the tongue of Francisco Mirelles, *señor*."

"Then yore daughter can't marry the Yaqui Kid next month or any other time, Miguel," said Sheriff Billy.

"*Señor*, what has Francisco Mirelles said to thee concerning my Benita and her lover?" he asked at length.

"He told me that the Yaqui Kid is already married to a woman in Mexico, at Adjuntas, and he goes there to live with her at times. There is a child two years old. An' you say yoreself Francisco don't lie."

"*Madre de Dios!*"

Miguel Delgado belched the words in a mighty breath. He seemed to shrivel, to withdraw into himself as a turtle draws into its shell. His hands clenched and unclenched stiffly and his lips were so tightly compressed that they turned inward and were white. For long he looked at Sheriff Billy through half-closed lids behind which his eyes glowed like two live coals.

Love is not peculiar to those who dwell in marble palaces. Sheriff Billy had heard of the great love of this disreputable old sheep-herder for his motherless daughter and he had wondered whether he couldn't make it work for him in his plan to take the Yaqui Kid. And the old man's love for his daughter was now torturing him, wrenching his heart strings, grinding his very soul. The Yaqui Kid had tricked him, had betrayed his daughter with honeyed words that could mean nothing, had bought her love with sweets and pretty trinkets.

Presently the old man got to his feet and fairly tottered to the bunk against the wall. From beneath the blankets he got a long-bladed knife and returned to his stool and sat down again. Over and over he ran the ball of his thumb along the edge of the keen blade, seeming to caress it.

"What are you goin' to do, Miguel?" asked Sheriff Billy at length when it seemed that the old man was indisposed to speak.

"Kill him, *señor!*" hissed the old man. "*Si, señor*, I will kill him! Like this!"

Miguel Delgado made a quick thrusting motion with the knife and his eyes glittered.

"It's yore funeral, Miguel, an' I don't know as I'm goin' to blame you a whole lot," said Sheriff Billy. "You-all give me the word when you git that signal you spoke about, an' I'll jest step into the other room an' let you an' the Kid have it out."

The old man said nothing. They waited in silence, minute on minute and hour on hour, for the coming of the Yaqui Kid.

Then, near midnight, very softly, from somewhere outside came the call of a quail. Again. And again. Miguel Delgado's lips tightened, and he nodded to Sheriff Billy.

The old sheep-herder, the blade of the knife up his sleeve and the handle of it gripped in strong fingers, picked up the lamp and moved toward the door.

Sheriff Billy strode into the other room and closed the door to a thin crack, and through the crack he watched, his gun in his hand in case Miguel's thrust should miss. He saw the old man set the lamp back on the table and take his stand near the middle of the room.

Several minutes passed, then the soft thud of horses' hoofs in the sand. Presently a man of rather small stature, with eyes like shining black beads, appeared in the doorway. He paused there for a moment or so and looked into the room uncertainly, then he entered. He had a six-gun in one hand, the muzzle of it up and ready.

"Where is the skunk!"

"Here, good friend," snarled Miguel.

Cold steel flashed and the long blade of Miguel's knife sank hilt-deep into the Yaqui

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Kid's breast, splitting his heart. The gun clattered to the floor and the body of the Yaqui Kid followed it and sprawled. With a piercing scream Benita Delgado leaped into the room and threw herself upon her knees beside the body.

"DID he shore 'nuff have a wife, Billy?" asked Tom Danton when Sheriff Billy was giving his deputy a detailed account of the affair at his bailiwick at Eagle a couple of days later.

"Which if that Francisco *hombre* knowed what he was talkin' about he shorely did," replied Sheriff Billy. "You see, Tom, I runs acrost this yere Francisco Mirelles party by what you-all might call the merest accident, which he seemed to know all about that Apache Kid miscreant. So I figgerated to play it for a hand."

"What was the idea, Billy?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Tom. When a man gits as old as you an' me he ain't so danged far from the pearly gates. At my time o' life I ain't got no hankerin' to be ventilatin' folks thataway. The time to do yore killin' is when yo're youthful an' headstrong, which then it's natural. I knowed if I got the Yaqui Kid I had to git him with a bullet first off, 'cause he's the kind o' gent you don't want to monkey with. I got to thinkin' about it an' kind o' figgerated Miguel Delgado had more real grievance ag'in the Kid than me, so I let him play the hand for his own an' I gits the Kid by proxy, as them law sharps says."

"Too bad about the girl, though, Billy."

"That turned out all right too," answered Sheriff Billy. "Her daddy explained the racket to her, an' I reckon if the Kid had come to life ag'in she would of bumped him off herself. Them Mexicans is jest as quick to hate as they are to love. The reason I sent her off after the Kid was I didn't want her there when I tells her old man about the Kid bein' married. It's mighty hard business convincin' some o' these yere fool sweethearts their lovers is anything but saints, an' I didn't want her there callin' me a liar an' influencin' her daddy. Any disturbances happen while I'm gone, Tom?"

"None a-tall, Billy, 'ceptin' one of them migratin' tooth carpenters comes through an' rides herd on a sore tooth for Baldy Moore." Sheriff Billy grunted.

SHIPWRECK

by Gordon Young

Author of "Men of the Night," "Dead or Alive," etc.

THIS is a story without a "kick" or a "punch"; and though it is about a girl and two men, there is no affection between them and no hate.

"*Shipwreck*," *copyright, 1922, by Gordon Young.*

THE *Queen City* was a stump-mast steamer that had been thumping and bumping along for twenty days or so out of San Francisco. She had nosed across the "line" and her passengers

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skylarked with Neptune. Some of them, as some always do, posed as old travelers to whom the equator was nothing new; and some who were old travelers pretended they had never been South before, because they knew it is the people who haven't crossed that get the most attention in the merry saloon games.

That evening red flames glowed at the edge of the world like a prophecy as the sun went into the ocean. Night came on, and with it an explosion, fire, panic, flight of crew in less than half-filled boats, the leaping of passengers into the sea, the shouting and sobbing, the cries, curses, shots of desperate officers.

The crew, after a frantic rush as if to do as they should, suddenly bolted overboard. The bawling chorus of "We're lost—we're lost!" was heard above the fire, above the screams of women, the yells, shouting and shooting that did no good in halting deserters. The fear-cries thrilled people with madness.

The officers, captain, and a Mr. Tichborne, fought crew and crazed passengers away from a boat and filled it with women and youngsters. The captain offered Mr. Tichborne a place in the overloaded boat:

"Men needed — navigate — maybe row——"

Mr. Tichborne turned his face away from the boat—his daughter was in it—as he refused:

"Let some seafaring man—who knows what to do—his place——"

The officers then each resisted the other's urge to take the two places where somebody could yet be squeezed in. Somebody had to go. The officers, shamed and angered by the cattle-like panic of the crew, were desperately indifferent to their lives, as if suicidal gallantry could somehow lessen the ship's disgrace. It was stupid, if brave, of them, as each second's delay added to the peril of the boat they were to attend. The captain ordered two into the boat, and the engineer—one of those left behind—cheered.

The overloaded boat swamped. The swells were high, rough.

Miss Tichborne felt the water meet her. She went breathless. Everything was dark and a bitter strangling filled her throat—then air and blinding light. One of the officers grasped her, supported her to a piece of grating, shouted at her to hang on. He swam off toward a struggling shape turned up by a black wave into the fierce light, and she did not see him again.

The ship streamed skyward as if upholding the heavens with a pillar of fire, and the flame light danced flickeringly in a great circle over the dark water.

Nothing but instinct was awake in her. She hung on, open-eyed but scarcely conscious, not feeling even the sousing wet, unaware of the strangling as she bobbed under—feeling nothing, not even the ache of loss.

Later, much later, when darkness had come again, a shout burst almost against her ears, a jerking grip fastened on her arm and vaguely stirred her consciousness. She held desperately to the grating, as if powers of darkness were snatching her from the only safe place.

A heavy impatient oath, a powerful jerk, and she was torn loose, half-lifted, scrapingly dragged into the boat. She had no impression of being rescued, no sensation of having been helped. If anything, without awakening to what was happening, she was incensed at being painfully dragged across the gunwale.

Two men were in the boat and one of them was a big-handed heavy-faced seabrute. Drayt was a sailor, nothing but a sailor, serious minded—perhaps stupidly so—and with hour-long silences had listened to the nimble-tongued ones of the forecastles, pondering what they said—often saying it with angry shouting—of ships, women, booze and sailormen's rights.

Drayt knew it wasn't all the crew's fault that there had been a rat-like swarming overboard. Every one of the lifeboats had been in their chocks, gripes lashed up hard as Turks' heads, and canvas covers laced down. The best seamen in the world, which that crew were not, couldn't have done much better since the boats had to be hauled up to the davits and swung out one end at a time.

The falls jammed. People climbed in, scrambled in, jumped in; and some hacked at ropes, cutting them away, so that part of the crew—without any thought of making off—were dumped into the water like apples out of a bucket.

It was a mess with no chance for order. People lost their heads and officers their lives, which in a way may have served them right.

Drayt had found himself overboard—as

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the saying is—with nothing to hold to but his neck. Fire had burst through the ship and its glare struck a sheen on the tumbling black water. He caught sight of something that glistened like a whale's back and swam for it. The jolly-boat had capsized and turned turtle.

By scrambling athwart the keel, gripping the submerged gunwale and tipping himself backward into the water, Drayt had heaved it over. He hung swimmingly onto it, feeling about until he found the lanyard with bailer attached. He worked hard, trying to bail. For one panful he threw out a ton seemed to override the tiny boat that drifted almost submerged. Air chambers were in the bow and stern, and he did get out enough water for him to crawl in over the stern and get the oars from their lashings. Landsmen in a panic had evidently tried to make off in the boat.

Drayt found himself some distance from the flaming wreck. He cried a deep hoarse—

"A-hoy!" The sound went with long-drawn propulsion that seemed almost endless in its reach. He laid his weight against the oars, heading for the ship, pausing to cry into the darkness about the fire that beat down on the water with dazzling glare. Sometimes, faintly, voices seemed to answer, but the roar of the burning ship made it hard to be sure of the distant sound. He tugged at the oars, throwing his hoarse-throated "A-hoy!" into the night, pulling for what he thought might be an answering cry.

Once he was near some one, heard even the porpoise-like breathing and splash of a swimmer—then silence. Not even a scream.

"Sharks!" Drayt muttered sullenly.

Shortly afterward he caught a glimmer of a white shirt and pulled a fellow into the boat, life buoy and all.

"Bail like ——," said Drayt.

The man groaned as he settled down in the bottom of the boat. Water nearly covered him. He did not move.

Long after the wreck had gone from sight, vanishing as devils go amid steam and smoke, Drayt bucked the swells, ahoying into the dark. Half the time the boat was half-filled with water, and he dug at it with a bailer. Water broke over the gunwales. The boat was pitched and tossed to the verge of being up-ended, stem over stern; but Drayt held on, fighting and hallooing—stirred and urged by something so deep within him that he didn't know it was there, some blood-call of the race, some instinct of nobility, that over and over, wherever tragedy strikes, rises above the so-called "first law of Nature" and daringly risks self for the preservation of another—of others—often strangers.

A grating bumped into the boat and Doris Tichborne was wrenched and hauled in over the gunwales.

THE moods of the sea are beyond the understanding of man; and before the night was out the waves fell. Something smoothed the surface of the sea, and with the coming of day they rode an ocean placid as a mirror, a badly made mirror, one with riffles in it.

Drayt stared sullenly into the dawn, into the great nothingness above the water. The air was fresh now, but the empty cloudless sky meant heat, thirsty blistering heat. From the locker under the stern sheets he had taken a breaker of rotten water. It was all they had to fight the heat. Without looking down, but as if to make sure it was there, he now felt for it with a big bare foot, rasping his toes along the iron hoops.

Drayt's dark sun-blackened, wind-beaten, stubbly face was molded in knots and lumps. The glint of color could hardly be seen under his narrowed lids. He had a heavy sober solid expression, and he sat lumpishly, humped over, a big hand wrapped on an oar. His face turned slowly round the compass points. There was nothing—not a speck to fasten his eyes on. There was now no need to do anything, and he had got no sleep in the night, so he dozed, sagging, squirming and shifting himself for a minute or two—then was motionless. He was too weary to feel the cramped awkwardness of the way he lay.

The other figure, huddled down like a half-empty sack of wet shavings—with a sort of dummy head stuck on to a wobbly neck—wore a collarless shirt with diamond studded links in the cuffs that slipped half over the thin soft hands. Sick or slightly asleep—just enough so to have nightmare—he moaned with ceaseless monotony. His thin, aristocratic, nearly perfect face had the pinched haggard look of dissipation. Seasickness punishes like wine. The dawn

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found his dark eyes empty as burned holes in a gray blanket.

In the bow the woman, half dead, sickly, wished for the relief of death but without any thought of seeking it. She stared hopefully against hopelessness for a steamer's smoke-plume or the glistening sheen of a windjammer's topsails. The sea was smooth as polished turquoise, with no movement but slow wide riffled swells, like slumbrous breathing. She felt frozen.

There had been the chill of the night air and wet clothes. There was the nervous depletion that leaves one aching with cold, even in tropic daylight. But she was not only the daughter of the gallant Tichborne—she remembered that she was, and honored his memory with tight-lipped silence.

Her hair, sopped with salt water, straggled down from coils and pins, lying in lank wisps on her shoulders and around her neck. On the ship every one had thought her a pretty young woman; but now she was indefinitely aged, with such an expression as might be on the face of a madwoman, quieted by nausea. She stared all around, depressedly amazed that there was no one in sight but themselves, not a bit of wreckage, not even a burned stick. The great hand of the ocean makes a clean sweep when it destroys.

Her eyes with an uninterested stare fell on Littledale, huddled down in the bottom of the boat, his head and arms drunkenly across a thwart. With deliberate scrutiny her gaze went to Drayt. His blue shirt was half torn off. His bare forearms were sunburned until the tattooing was blurred. She knew men like Littledale—knew him—had met him—danced with him—had taken him for granted as a part of social life as she took stewards for granted as a part of ship life. So far as she knew or cared the young men she had touched socially all through her life may have been fine fellows, but no one had greatly interested her.

She had never known men like Drayt—had seen something like him at work on docks, always heaving big cases or barrels, calling out, one to another, with hoarse voices, or standing with idle slouch, ugly, strong, glimmerings of danger in their staring eyes. To her, Drayt's lumpish face seemed to have something of the animal, of the brute, in it. He was one of the crew, and the crew had been cowardly. Her father was dead because they had run off with the boats.

With a warmth of anger, she hoped some day to tell the world what cowards those men had been; and the stare she gave Drayt looked through and beyond him to a time when he would stand like a whipped dog while she told what she knew.

The water was calm, but the boat seemed very unsteady. She stood up to see farther, half crouching to brace herself against the gunwales.

The first feeling is that relief has to come, soon. The little speck of a castaway prays a bit and believes that the hand that moves the sun will send a ship—any minute. The belief is instinctive, unconscious, invariably in the first hours. A day or two of heat, thirst, drunken sickness, the dizzying sheen of unending water, changes all this into despair that nothing, *nothing*, can break through that imprisoning circle made by the mingling of sea and sky.

A BREEZE came. From afar off she could see it ruffling the water. In a little while the swell deepened, turned into waves, and she was thrown off her feet by the jerky rocking and almost went overboard.

Littledale roused himself. He looked half dead. He felt even more close to death. He stared at the girl. Something, some trace of a former likeness that had been thrilling made him know that he knew her; but he was uninterested. She had the thinned appearance that wet clothes give, and the wet hair was wrapped about her neck and side of her face like seaweed about a corpse. He did not care who she was or what she looked like.

He felt miserable, but now he made no sound at all. Of all conceivable things in this world he would have asked just for land, something stationary, permanent, something that wouldn't move. From strain and exhaustion he had been in a weary semi-consciousness that was half sleep and part sickness. Now he could scarcely hold up his head. He did not complain.

The wind grew stronger. Waves got up and chopped at the boat. Drayt slept and snored. Littledale gazed toward him. Everybody would have been saved but for the cowardly crew. This loutish fellow, hunched over, mouth adroop, was one of

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them. The rocking of the boat increased Littledale's distress. He tried to keep his head up—but nothing mattered. He folded his arms on a thwart and lay forward.

It grew hot. The sea roughened. A hatful of spray hit Drayt and he raised up alert as a Jack-in-a-box, as instantly awake as a sailor roused by "All hands!" At a glance he relapsed into sluggishness, yawned heavily, stretched his enormous arms, and looked all around with slow movement. He watched the girl for a time, then—

"Feelin' sick, miss?"

Miss Tichborne's face was pale as the inside of an egg shell. She shook her head slightly.

"How 'bout you? Sick?"

Littledale did not answer. Drayt knew they were sick. His questions were companionable and nothing more. For some time he stared from one to the other, doubtfully. The breaker, a small one, had about three gallons of water, and the odor was that of bilge. The tin of biscuits had been stowed away in the stern locker so long they were tasteless with mold.

"Damn steamboat!" Drayt growled, eying the breaker between his feet.

He was a sailor by training, instinct, everything. In a weak moment he had signed on a stump-mast steamer by way of getting a bit of the easy life and good food he had heard about; which, like most of the good things that are promised to sailormen, never are had this side of heaven—and of late certain persons of skeptical and scientific tendencies have cast doubt on even the ultimate reward of noble bravery, honest hard toil, and a mighty reverence for such works of God as sea, sun, sky and winds.

There wasn't much said among them that day, though two or three times Drayt made an attempt at speech. The wind got up, and with an oar over the stern he kept the boat before the sea, steering with careless, instinctive ease. Miss Tichborne sank down and was motionless. The noon heat was blistering. Littledale's neck at the base of the head was red as a boil.

Some time a little earlier than the middle of the afternoon Littledale lifted his head and asked for water. His eyes were hot, with a gleam in them. Drayt did not say anything, but put the bailer between his knees and raising the water cask poured out three or four mouthfuls. Littledale grasp-

ingly took the bailer and stared at the bottom, which was scarcely covered.

"Here—I'm sick—I need water," he said savagely, as if with half a mind to throw bailer and all into Drayt's face.

But he put it to his mouth, gulped—spit and coughed chokingly, trying to swear as he coughed, and angrily flung out the few drops that were left.

"Why didn't you tell me—you knew—it *stinks!*" he screamed.

His head gave way and he sank dizzily, vaguely moaning:

"Oh water—I'm sick—drink——"

"It hit 'im quicker 'an is usual," said Drayt, as if aloud to himself, which was his way of addressing Miss Tichborne, who looked with alarmed puzzlement at Littledale. "The sun a-ready, and the water *is* rotten."

Miss Tichborne said nothing. Her head ached. She was highly feverish. She stared dully at Drayt.

"Now, miss, I know it's hard—hard for you an' him there. An' I'm not one to have you too hopeful about where we're goin' to bring up. You can't tell about the ocean. I was onct sixteen days adrif' with eight o' us. Hot, like now. Bad days an' nights them were, with us a-rowin' an' a-sailin', with nothin' but a lubber's guess as to where we was. 'Twas the *Darlin' Pride* out o' Liverpool, homeward bound from N' Orleans with cotton—an' fire 'tween decks did it.

"Slow fire, not like las' night. Half pint water a day was what we had, an' it was bad water—like this, an' worse 'd keep you alive. It's water as you've got to have—it's more'n somethin' to eat—an' here we got a-plenty for—uh—for some little time as yet. Why, I seen——"

But Drayt did not tell what he had seen, for nothing is to be seen like a thirst-craze, when the throat is swollen shut for lack of a drink and a world of water lies over the side, within hands' reach.

"Jus' remember this, miss, about the ocean. You have to be patient an' wait—jus' wait, an' don't do much thinkin' about things. You're bound to fetch up agains' land if you jus' last long enough, with the chanct o' bein' sighted by a ship throwed in as somethin' extra to look forrard to. So, miss, don't give up *all* your hope, but don't have so much o' it that you'll think ever'thing's lost if we're still adrift some days

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from now. It's bad, him gettin' hit so quick, but I've seen 'em pull through. Oh, yes, I've seen 'em——"

Drayt talked heavily, with an air of determination. His thick lips were not flexible. They scarcely moved. He was not at ease, and frequently wet his lips with his tongue, then wiped his mouth with the back of the left hand, always with the left hand.

"Now, miss, my shirt's blue an' can't be seen much distance agains' the water. His shirt he'll need 'r all his skin'll fry right on 'im. If you'll jus' give me a petticoat or somethin', I'll stick it on 'n oar an' maybe—it's as how you can't tell, ever, about the ocean."

Drayt tied the white garment to the blade, stepped the oar and lashed it firmly with the painter. The thin cloth waved flutteringly, and it gave a little cheer to Miss Tichborne. It seemed like something kindly and on the alert to attract any passing ship.

With evening the wind lessened, but the waves deepened. The boat would slide down a long greasily green slope, ruffled with boiling patches, and plunge nose-on, dropping as a tripped race-horse falls, settling with a soft jar in the shadowed trough deep down under the unresting sides of moving hills. The white petticoat on the up-raised oar blade—like a flag of truce the ocean would not see—folded itself dispiritedly. There was no pause, no moment's rest at the bottom of the trough. The tug of the upward heave, swelling out under the boat, unhurriedly lifted it higher and higher, at a sharp slant, until the petticoat in fluttering hope caught the breeze and again tried to spread itself to the on-coming night.

For the second that the boat would be poised on the wave's top, the three people turned strained eyes above the gunwales to the four corners of the horizon circle that closed in on them with misty, impenetrable vagueness. Then it dropped, falling bow on, down the steep oily green side. One great rolling wave after another heaved and shunted the little boat forward, urging, hurrying, driving it on into the night.

THE quartermaster of the U. S. S. *Lynx* saw a fluttering dot on top of the water some six miles off and called the eyes of the officer of the deck to it. Presently the bobbing speck became a boat adrift, and the officer of the deck sent word to the captain; whereupon the *Lynx* changed her course and bore down upon the tiny craft drifting under a shred of rag tied to an oar blade.

No signs of life, until about a hundred yards off a blackened skeleton with a woman's hair came into the captain's binoculars. She feebly half-raised an arm in greeting.

"A woman!"—"Alone!"—"She's fainted."—"No — there's somebody else."—"She's pulling at somebody."—"That's a dead man that's looking up at us!"—"They've sure been to hell an' back."—"There's another one—see? In the bottom—see?"—"Three people for God knows how long in that nut shell!"——

The officer of the deck hailed the boat, but there was no answer except that the woman seemed to be pointing to her mouth and shaking her head.

"Can't talk!"

The sea was smooth. The *Lynx* lowered away a cutter, and half a dozen bluejackets laid alongside the boat and brought it under the cutter's davits. It was hoisted on deck. Three skeleton forms were in it, and two of them sat motionless, staring with the great bright eyes that hunger has; and the other, the largest, was motionless with eyes closed.

The doctor, a stout bustling little man with a passion for the sea and its wonders, took charge. As his apprentices bent over to lift the woman out, she protested with gestures that had no strength, and as she pointed at the big skeleton-like form in the bottom of the boat, throaty harsh sounds, as when a mute tries to talk, came from her. No one understood what she meant, but they lifted her anyway.

In a few hours she began trying to talk. She was black as a Hindu and looked like a famine sufferer lying in the big white bunk screened off in the sick bay. She did not know how long they had been adrift—days or weeks. There had been nothing to eat, nothing but crums. And water—at every squall they caught every drop they could; but it didn't last.

Her voice was a husky whipser, and her first words had been about the big sailor—she did not know his name, but would he live?

The doctor was sure that he wouldn't, but said it was a little doubtful as yet.

"He must not die—you must not let him

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die!" she ordered, her great brown eyes glowing.

Every time she saw the doctor—her own strength was increasing—the first question was about the sailor who fluttered weakly within death's grasp.

The doctor wondered, did he, that she and Littledale had stood the hardship better than a tough-fibered sailor?

Once Littledale, mad from thirst and sun, had jumped overboard, and the sailor, with powerful sweep of the sculling oar, had come over him and dragged him back inboard, where Littledale, for a time insane, had fought in a way that nearly wrecked the boat.

Later that day the sailor rationed out water to them—hardly a mouthful apiece, and the day was fearfully hot.

A few minutes afterward the sailor said—

"Think I'll have mine now," and holding the cask—as he frequently did in pouring for himself, so they couldn't see how much came out—he put the bailer to his mouth and swallowed two or three times. She suspected him of drinking more than his share, and when he had put it down she looked for the water line in the bottom of the bailer—and found it dust-dry. She said to the doctor that she had cried for an hour after that, and she didn't know why except that she couldn't help it.

A day or so later when the big sailor died she cried noiselessly all the night, and the doctor wished he could court-martial the fool hospital apprentice that had told her.

NOT THE MAN TO FOOL WITH

by **Lewis Appleton Barker**

IN THE Spring of 1874, "Wild Bill" Hickok closed a theatrical engagement with Buffalo Bill, in which, with the latter and "Texas Jack" Omohundro, he had appeared in a drama, entitled "Scouts Of The Plains." Before his departure, the two others had made up and presented him with a purse of one thousand dollars.

Hickok accordingly went to New York City, where in a laudable endeavor to break a faro bank he became penniless. As a result he accepted another theatrical engagement, but soon quit the same. After he had ceased this connection, the manager, filling his rôle with a bogus imitation of the borderer, went on advertizing "Wild Bill."

Upon learning of this imposture the latter attended the performance at Binghamton, New York, where, when the fictitious hero was destroying a band of Indians, he jumped upon the stage and threw the counterfeit presentment of himself through a back drop. He submitted to arrest, and after a hearing in the morning, was fined three dollars and costs.

From here he proceeded to Cheyenne, where on his first evening, with a long coat on and his hat drawn over his eyes, he stood playing faro in the place of one Boulder. He had begun betting with small amounts, and losing, had doubled each time. Finally his stake reached fifty dollars, which, upon the wrong card appearing, the dealer took.

Wild Bill immediately put down another fifty dollars and won. Not knowing who he was, the dealer roughly informed him that the limit was twenty-five dollars, and pushed that amount toward him.

"Didn't you take my fifty, just now?" queried Bill.

"Yes, but the limit's dropped," replied the other.

After an interchange of words, several bouncers appeared, and Hickok struck the dealer over the head with his cane, and knocked down the bouncers. A number of bystanders being about to jump on him, he backed into a corner, threw off his wide-brimmed hat, and was about to draw his revolvers, when the barkeeper, who had heard the noise downstairs, appeared, and recognizing him, shouted:

"Look out, boys. That's Wild Bill."

Any further attack was immediately discontinued, and Mr. Boulder, with profuse apologies, "set up" refreshments for the crowd.

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The CAMP-FIRE

A FREE-TO-ALL MEETING PLACE FOR READERS WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine T. Von Ziekursch follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Upper Darby, Pennsylvania.

It may interest you to know that you nearly published a posthumous story in this case. The day after I sent you this story I departed for Canada on one of my many wanderings into the far corners. There was an old buddy whom I had not seen for years and who wanted me to spend a while with him back in the woods where I left him.

WHEN I left the end of the railroad with only about twelve miles to go to his cabin I was beating into a real blizzard. But I felt so sure of myself that I did not bother about loading up on grub. In my kit was a ten-cent bar of chocolate and one orange. It was dark when I started and, somehow, I lost the trail in the storm. For the next three days I wandered. The chocolate and the orange, which froze, constituted my food supply. Very foolishly I had not bothered about a compass or a case for my rifle which promptly froze solid inside the barrel and magazine. When the snow stopped on the second day it became colder. One night I slept in an abandoned cabin and the other two were spent in hastily thrown up brush shelters. On the morning of the fourth day I was about ready to write some farewells in the fly-leaves of a tiny volume of Thoreau that I carried in my kit. And then I came out on a trail with fresh sledge-tracks and found a man and a cabin and food and a fire and you can not by any stretch of the imagination realize what they all meant. Another twelve hours and this story of the dog would have been posthumous beyond doubt.

HOWEVER, that is only one more experience to add to those treasures which fill a memory no gold could buy. Of myself and my wanderings, adventures, experiences, whatever you want to call them, there is little to say. Some lumbering, some railroading, some newspaper work, with now and then in the past a harsher experience where the

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gun was not pointed at an animal. Some men have condescended to call me a naturalist, others a writer, others a bum. Perhaps a little of each and the largest measure belonging to the latter. What does it matter?

However, one more thing I would like to say. Whatever I have gone through, or done, or been done to, all these I think have increased my capacity for emotion instead of lessening it. And I have a fairly fixed conviction that writing is emotion translated. The emotion that generates the story may be caused by something far different from that which forms the theme of the story and it is my utmost desire to go on just as I have gone before, only, giving in the form of writing those emotions, those things and thoughts and experiences that have been mine.—T. Von Ziekursch.

The following letter from Mr. Von Ziekursch came with the manuscript of his story. I am no authority on malemiut, but I'm strong on the theory that any dog can be made a reliable friend if he's treated as one from puppyhood. When I say "dog" it doesn't include the lap-canines and such, about which I always hope to know nothing whatever except that they're not dogs. The other day I talked with Jack Hines, whom most old Alaskans remember, and he, of course, strongly upholds Mr. Von Ziekursch's theory that malemiut raised with decent kindness are as dependable as any other dog. Some day I hope to get a malemiut pup and prove the theory by at least one example.

Upper Darby, Pennsylvania.

Where you find adventure there you find a dog. I have often thought of that axiom during my ramblings, and don't believe I ever knew it to fail.

AT VARIOUS times my experiences with dogs have been rather more than interesting. I have raised and broken my own sledge teams and found that the husky can be handled readily enough if he is treated pretty much the same as any other dog should be treated. Of course, you can not take a mature one that has been starved and beaten all his life and do anything with him.

I took one that I had raised myself through Mexico with me nine years ago and owe my present existence to that fact, for he saved me from having my throat slashed after I had collected four bullets in various parts of my anatomy during the course of a little trouble.

AT PRESENT I have one here now. I brought it from the Mackenzie country nearly two years ago when it was a pup, and every kid on the countryside swears by it. They pull its hair and do about everything conceivable to it, yet it has never turned on one of them. However, it has managed to kill one perfectly good Airedale and put a bull terrier *hors de combat*.—T. Von Ziekursch.

ONE of you sent us a newspaper clipping stating that the British Columbia Game Conservation Board was offering salary and bounty for killing cougars on Vancouver Island. Though he said the story was handled by the Canadian Associated Press, he advised writing the Game Conservation Board before going a-hunting. One of you up in Saskatchewan wrote and sent me the reply from the acting secretary of the Board stating the newspaper story was "absolutely incorrect." So that's that.

SOME interesting words from Hugh Pendexter in connection with his serial beginning in this issue:

Norway, Maine.

The time of "Pay Gravel!" is from August 1st to September 16, or the day before Wild Bill Hickock was killed to the day General Crook's soldiers arrived in Deadwood City. So much has been written about Wild Bill, especially in *Adventure*, it seemed best to have his murder occur off-stage. Leander P. Richardson, who traveled much and wrote much of the West during the various gold-stampedes, entered the Black Hills and arrived at Deadwood City three days before Wild Bill was killed. It may interest *Adventure* readers to know Richardson's estimate of Wild Bill, and I quote from his article on the hills published in *Scribner's*, April, 1877.

"I HAD been in town only a few moments when I met Charley Utter, better known in the West as 'Colorado Charley,' to whom I had a letter of introduction, and who at once invited me to share his camp while I remained in the region. On our way over to his tent we met J. B. Hickock, 'Wild Bill,' the hero of a hundred battles. Bill was Utter's 'pardner,' and I was introduced at once. Of course I had heard of him, the greatest scout in the West, but I was not prepared to find such a man as he proved to be. Most of the Western scouts do not amount to much. They do a great deal in the personal reminiscence way, but otherwise they are generally of the class described as 'frauds.' In Wild Bill I found a man who talked little and had done a great deal.

"He was about six feet two inches in height, and very powerfully built; his face was intelligent, his hair blond, and falling in long ringlets over his broad shoulders; his eyes, blue and pleasant, looked straight in the face when he talked; and his lips, thin and compressed, were only partly hidden by a straw-colored mustache. His costume was a curious, blended union of the habiliments of the borderman and the drapery of the fashionable dandy. Beneath the skirts of his elaborately embroidered buckskin coat gleamed the handles of two silver-mounted revolvers, which were his constant companions. His voice was low and musical, but through its hesitation I could catch a ring of self-reliance and conscicusness of strength. Yet he was the most courteous man I had met on the plains.

"On the following day I asked to see him use a pistol, and he assented. At his request I tossed a tomato-can about fifteen feet in the air, both the

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pistols being in his belt when it left my hand. He drew one of them and fired two bullets through the can before it struck the ground. Then he followed it along, firing as he went, until both weapons were empty. You have heard the expression, 'quick as lightning'? Well, that will describe Wild Bill. He was noted all over the country for rapidity of motion, courage, and certainty of aim. Wherever he went he controlled the people around him, and many a quarrel has been ended by his simple announcement, 'This has gone far enough.'

"EARLY in the forenoon of my third day in Deadwood, word was brought over to camp that he had been killed! We went immediately to the scene and found that the report was true. He had been sitting at a table, playing cards, when a dastardly assassin came up behind, put a revolver to his head and fired, killing his victim instantly. That night a miners' meeting was called, the prisoner was brought before it, his statement was heard, and he was discharged, put on a fleet horse, supplied with arms and guarded out of town.

"The next day Colorado Charley took charge of the remains of the great scout and announced that the funeral would occur at his camp. The body was clothed in a full suit of broadcloth, the hair was brushed back from the broad forehead, and the blood washed from the pallid cheek. Beside the dead hero lay his rifle, which was buried with him. The funeral ceremony was brief and touching, hundreds of rough miners standing around the bier with bowed heads and tear-dimmed eyes—for with the better class Wild Bill had been a great favorite. At the close of the ceremony the coffin was lowered into a new-made grave on the hillside—the first in Deadwood. And so ended the life of Wild Bill, a man whose supreme physical courage had endeared him to nearly all with whom he came in contact, and made his name a terror to every Indian west of the Missouri."

IN A foot-note Richardson says: "Word reaches me that the slayer of Wild Bill has been re-arrested by the United States authorities and after trial has been sentenced to death for willful murder. He is now at Yankton, D. T., awaiting execution. At the time of the trial it was proved that the murderer was hired to do his work by gamblers, who feared the time when better citizens should appoint Bill the champion of law and order, a post which he formerly sustained in Kansas border life with credit to his manhood and his courage."

H. N. MAGUIRE, another contemporary of Hickock's and author of "The Coming Empire," 1878, in part says: "John B. Hickok [Maguire's spelling] widely known as 'Wild Bill,' was killed by Jack McCall, in Deadwood—the perpetrator being hired, it is said, to commit the bloody deed. The great notoriety Wild Bill had acquired by his adventurous career as a scout in the Civil War, and in many desperate recontres on the frontiers—in which he had proved himself to be a man of marked courage and self-possession in moments of the greatest personal danger—to be a man, too, his friends say, of magnanimous nature and generous impulses—caused his murder to be noted and commented upon by all newspapers of the country, resulting in giving the Black Hills an unmerited reputation for lawlessness.

"And his murder was one of the most dastardly acts ever committed, the assassin, toward whom he had no malice, stealing upon him when he was not expecting an attack and fatally shooting him in the back of the head. A few days before his assassination Wild Bill was invited to act as umpire in a dispute between two gamblers, and accepted the dangerous office. The gamblers were about to disregard the mutual agreement to settle by arbitration and resort to their pistols, when Wild Bill promptly drew two revolvers and, with one covering each antagonist, swore he would kill the one who fired first. Thus the effusion of blood was prevented on that particular occasion; but it is said this affair was the real cause of Hickok's assassination—that McCall was hired and encouraged to commit the bloody deed by men who wished Wild Bill out of the way; but lacked the courage to attack him themselves. Wild Bill's was the second interment in the Deadwood cemetery." (Above, Richardson says the first).

MAGUIRE says that a gambler named Shannon was killed by a gambler named Moore in a rifle duel near Crook City. Moore was acquitted and Shannon, says Maguire, was the first victim to be buried in Deadwood. This author in commenting on McCall's acquittal at the miners' or citizens' meeting, in part says—"The most incapable and irresolute popular tribunal ever known to be assembled on the frontiers." McCall was hanged March 1st, 1877.

COLORADO CHARLEY and Arapahoe Joe arranged for Bill's headstone, and I quote the reading on the stone from a photograph of the same taken shortly after the stone was set in place. Utter's spelling was the same as Richardson's:

(Wild Bill)
J. B. Hickock
Killed by the Assassin
Jack McCall
In Deadwood, Black Hills, August 2, 1876
Pard, we will meet again in the Happy
Hunting Grounds to part no more.
Colorado Charley,
C. H. Utter.

AMONG other characters widely known in the hills at the time of my story were Kitty the Schemer, Calamity Jane, Miss Martha Canary and Tricks. So much has been written about Calamity Jane I have kept her out of the story, although from my earliest "Deadwood Dick" novel reading (Beadle & Adams) she has been a prime favorite of mine. Maguire says Jane insisted she had been cruelly abused by the public press from New York to San Francisco, having been variously represented as a "horse-thief," "Highwaywoman," "three-card monte sharp" and "a minister's daughter." She visited a Deadwood editor and insisted the calumnies should cease, and thereafter he spoke more becomingly of her. She admitted she had dressed in male attire, buckskins, served as a scout in the Indian campaign, worked as stage driver, and had made several long trips as a bullwhacker. Maguire says that Jane charged, "probably with much truth, that if she has done anything wrong society, and not herself, is to blame, as she always came near starving to death when she tried to support herself

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in 'a more womanly way'." This writer states Jane could throw an oyster-can high in the air and put two bullets through it before it hit the ground, and was always ready to bet she could knock a fly off an ox's ear with a sixteen-foot whip-lash three times out of five.

SOME contributors to Camp-Fire have spoken of Jane as being in Deadwood when Wild Bill was killed. I don't know. Captain John G. Bourke says ("On the Border With Crook") that in the Summer campaign of 1876, while Gen. Crook was waiting on Goose Creek, largest tributary of Tongue River, for the return of Frank Grouard, Louis Richard and Big Bat, scouts, "it was whispered that one of our teamsters was a woman, and no other than 'Calamity Jane,' a character famed in border story; she had adorned the raiment of the alleged rougher sex, and was skinning mules with the best of them. She was eccentric and wayward, rather than bad, and had adopted male attire more to aid her in getting a living than for any immoral purpose. Jane was as rough and burly as any of her messmates, and it is doubtful if her sex would ever have been discovered had not the wagon-master noted that she didn't cuss her mules with the enthusiasm to be expected from a graduate of Patrick & Saulsbury's Black Hills Stage Line, as she had represented herself to be."

WHETHER Jane proceeded with Crook's forces and made the march to the head of Heart River, and then participated in the celebrated "horse meat" march from the Heart to Deadwood City, or whether she quit the outfit and returned to the hills, via Fort Laramie, I don't know. That she was entirely a different sort of woman from Tricks, a product of the Montana mining camps, and Kitty the Schemer, whose biography I have touched upon in the story, is very evident. That she was generous and good hearted, and often did a man's work to earn a living is also thoroughly established as a fact. Old-timers, who knew Jane, invariably have nothing but good to say of her and her memory will continue to hold a place in the romance of frontier history long after such as Kitty the Schemer and Tricks are wholesomely lost in oblivion.

In describing Crook's campaign Bourke says the command didn't know whether it was on the North fork of the Grand, or the South fork of Owl, their maps being practically worthless.

THE railroad station of "Ogalalla," where a train was held up, I have spelled Oglala, so as to agree with the accepted spelling of the Teton division of the Dakota. As the railroad station name is given in different forms in various atlases, some of them contemporary with the time of the story, I have ventured to take this orthographic liberty.

The statement that "gold was to be found from the grass-roots down" in the Black Hills has generally been credited to Gen. Custer, who led the Government expedition to that virgin territory in 1874. But Walter P. Jenney, geologist in charge of the 1875 expedition, says California Joe, who was with his party, used the expression and prophetically added to it, "but more gold will be found from the grass-roots up," referring to the grazing and tillable lands.

THE massacre of the Metz family in Red Cañon occurred just before Richardson, quoted from above, went through the cañon, and at a "spring on the right-hand side." The Indians fired on them while they were eating supper, and, out of five men and two women, killed all but Mr. and Mrs. Metz. Metz soon fell. Mrs. Metz ran for a quarter of a mile before she was shot down. The other woman was a negro servant. It was currently reported at the time that the horse-thieves, who did a flourishing business, had their headquarters on the divide between Spring and Rapid creeks, even as I have it in the story.

"HORSESHOE" WEBB is patterned after a highwayman, known as Webb, who boldly entered Deadwood for supplies, was recognized in front of the Grand Central Hotel by a former victim, and escaped after wounding the citizen. He sent back word he was coming to Deadwood to even up with the citizen for inconveniencing him by his recognition.

The sign of the Bed Rock Hotel is copied verbatim.

The story of the 1852 party of nineteen, all of whom were massacred in Deadwood Gulch with the exception of Tom Renshaw, is also true.

Scissors is drawn from a character in Western Pennsylvania when that country was the frontier. His immunity from Indina attacks was due to his amazing skill in cutting out pictures, which the Indians considered to be a gift from their big mysteries, or big medicines, or as we style it, their "gods."

Only one treasure coach was ever robbed so far as I know, and only $25,000 was secured. The lack of guards, there being but two, invited the attack. All other treasure coaches, carrying $200,000 or more, had 12 guards.

Shunca-luta (Sorrel Horse) possessed the powers of ventriloquism and sleight-of-hand as I have depicted. Captain Bourke describes him doing the sick stunt, with the lighted pipe bowl in his mouth. General Mackenzie selected cards from a deck and the Indian medicine-man named them as fast as drawn.

American Horse was shot through the body at the Slim Butte battle, when Crazy Horse's village was attacked by Crook, who was then swinging south to Deadwood. American Horse died on the way to Deadwood.

The military society known as the "Strong Hearts" was as I have described it. *Scissors's* song at Mato Tipi (Bear Butte) was one of the songs used in treating the sick and refers to Bear Butte in the Black Hills. There were two buttes of this name visited and held in awe by the Tetons. The other was in Montana.

I have not exaggerated any in referring to how the Indian agents grossly underestimated the number of warriors absent from the agencies.

Crazy Horse surrendered in the fall of 1876, together with Little Big Man and other of his chiefs. He escaped from the Red Cloud Agency in September, 1877, and was captured at Spotted Tail agency and brought back to Red Cloud. There he attacked the guards with a knife (some reports say "two knives") and Little Big Man jumped on his back and attempted to secure his hands and was cut in the arm. Gen. L. P. Bradley in reporting the affair adds that in the struggle Crazy Horse was wounded

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in the abdomen by either a knife or a bayonet, the surgeons being in doubt which, and died at midnight. Big Road, Jumping Shield, and Little Big Man, leading men of his band, were satisfied Crazy Horse "died as the result of his own folly," says the Bradley report.

Bourke comments on the discrepancy in the various accounts of the great chief's death. Some said the sentinel at the door of the guard-house gave the mortal wound with his bayonet in return for a knife-thrust from the chief. Others said Little Big Man, while holding down the chief's hands, caused the chief to inflict the wound on himself. Bourke says that Little Big Man, at the Sun Dance in 1881, told him that he, Little Big Man, unintentionally killed the chief with the latter's own knife, which was stilleto-shape and made a wound like a bayonet.—PENDEXTER.

As we've had no reports to the contrary, I judge Hugh Pendexter got away with the jug trick to his own complete satisfaction:

In the "Camp-Fire" chat I have refrained from mentioning the jug-medicine. Just as soon as I can get up town and secure a stout earthenware jug I will work the same medicine as *Scissors* did; or failing to do so I will supply a different brand of medicine, almost as good.

OF COURSE one can bust a jug as I have described. My brother-in-law, superintendent of the Cambria Steel works, did the whole stunt while a high-school boy here and doing camp-chores for some grown-ups on the lake. He broke a jug while getting water from the lake. Filled it to overflowing and (probably resenting being sent for it) smashed the stopper home and knocked out the bottom. Even when a youth he was a wizard in physics, etc., and he fitted the two parts together, filled the jug to overflowing, gently inserted the stopper enough to make it stick and exclude air and carried it to the camp. One of the men, still in his bunk, demanded it and received it. When he pulled out the stopper the jug collapsed, and he couldn't blame my b-in-l as the boy wasn't within ten feet of him when it happened.

BUT of course I will do it myself before I feel that certainty of conviction that only a newspaper man can feel, who has been told a good story but insists on getting it first hand before printing. There is hardly any end to the dope one can write on the hills in connection with this story, but I've gone it pretty strong as it is. Chop out anything you don't care for. All this, of course, if you like and care for the yarn. With best wishes to the whole outfit.—PENDEXTER.

WHEN F. St. Mars sent us his story in this issue he sent with it the following note:

The author once watched four weasels which suddenly commenced fighting over the dead body of a female in a trap. They fought till three of their number died and the fourth could scarcely crawl. In this case, as in the article, the end found them in a hopeless tangle.

Extract from "A Hand-Book To The British Mammalia," (E. Lloyd, Ltd.) by Richard Lydekker, B. A., F. R. S., which runs as follows:

"'As an example of the pugnacious habits of the weasel, we may mention that (as we are informed by Mr. Harrie-Brown) there is in the Banff Museum an extraordinary mummified group of these animals, found in a hole of an old tree-stump, all the members of which evidently perished while fighting together.'"

WE ARE going to have a new policy as to poetry. First, less of it. Second, when we buy verse we're going to try to buy only the kind that really gets hold of a man. Literary and academic finish will be a minor consideration. The average verse in magazines goes off me like water off a duck's back. When you've read it nothing's happened. Except a pretty noise and the keeping of a lot of rules most of which are highly artificial and imposed by people who've lost sight of what the essence of real poetry is. The rest of us in the office feel pretty much the same way and I've an idea most of you do.

A poem that gets in to where a man lives, conveys to him a real emotion, really touches the springs of sympathy in his breast, *is* poetry. The right kind of poetry will stir me up till my eyes incline to get wet, but I don't give a —— for most of the empty stuff I see in print. It's written by people who feel nothing—or nothing worth feeling—and tell you about it more or less beautifully. If they ever had anything worth transmitting it is squeezed to death by the time they've exhausted their limited abilities in the struggle with rules and precedents. My feelings on magazine verse in general are expressed in just two words—"Aw, ——!"

And if any disciple of the academic, long-haired or short, thinks I'm speaking merely from a sea of ignorance and an uncultured point of view, possibly I can demonstrate to him that my academic education has been at least as complete as his. It may even turn out that the chief difference between us is that I began life in what he calls a cultured atmosphere, absorbed something more than my share of academic education, reverenced what he calls "literature" as much as he does and then years ago kicked most of the sickly mess overboard to try to get closer to the real things in both life and literature, whereas in his case the process has been reversed. Not that I've got very far, but at least I've had horse-sense enough to try, which is another point of difference between us.

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Anyhow, when our magazine chooses poetry after this it is going to try to get poems with something in them besides words. Remember, I said *try*. There aren't a lot of them and of course we on the staff are no marvels who never guess wrong. But gradually we're going to try to make our magazine stand for the kind of poetry a he-man can get something out of. Which doesn't mean that it has to be "rough stuff" or doggerel, but does mean that it has to be *something* and that its academic qualities will be a secondary consideration. If you're for the general idea, bear with us in our attempts.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Captain F. A. M. Webster rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

There are some points of interest in connection with "The Soul of A Native."

(1) The run described was molded on one in which I took part.

(2) The character Umbelazi is modeled upon that of an old warrior, named Jubattla, who was a great fighting man. When we finished up in German East Africa he went up for the scrap with the Masai, and then took a hand in the row with the Somalis which followed, despite the fact that he was just on 65 years of age.

(3) I once knew a native woman who carried a talisman imbedded in the living flesh beneath the armpit, as Nava carried the diamond, and the swelling was as described in the story.

(4) I've altered the lightning incident to meet the editor's views; but, all the same, I've known that element play some mighty queer tricks out in Africa.

(5) 14 to 15 years is the *earliest* age at which the African native girl becomes marriageable, but I have known women of several tribes who have kept their own peculiar type of beauty and remained single until over 20 years of age.

MY PEOPLE have been doctors for three or four generations, my great grandfather was Fleet Surgeon to Lord Nelson and took part in the Battle of Trafalgar. My father was cousin to Lord Alverston, the Lord Chief Justice of England, who, as Richard Webster, was a well known Cambridge Blue.

I had the usual public school education, with one interlude in 1900 when I went off on my own and joined the cavalry as a trumpeter, in the hope of getting out to South Africa for the Boer War, but as I was at that time not quite 13, there was nothing doing!

When I left St. Albans, the oldest school in England, in 1904, I was Captain of the School. The following and in subsequent years I won several divisional records, high jump 5 ft., 10¾ ins.; broad jump 22 ft., 7 ins., and 100 yards dash 10 1-5 secs., in 1911 I was English javelin throwing champion, and, having been patched up after the war, I won the Midland Counties javelin throwing championship and an Olympic trial. Played association football for England against France, and have won some horse races.

IN 1911 I married, and we have three jolly youngsters, the eldest a boy of six, shows promise of being a pole-vaulter, the other two are girls. We all live in a jolly old English home out at Bromham in Bedfordshire, close to where John Bunyan produced the "Pilgrim's Progress."

My "circumstantial untruths" are evolved in an old barn (which my friends tell me looks like a room out of a play), by the simple and engaging process of sweating blood; but all the same nearly all my stories, which bring me in the best part of 1200 to 1500 pounds a year, are founded upon personal experience and the things I have seen and heard East of Suez.

I HAVE traveled and hunted big-game in some out of the way places and have got all the fun and excitement possible out of life; now I try to reproduce it all in my novels and short stories.

During the Great War I held adjutancies twice and served in France, Italy, Egypt, India and East Africa.

So far my wanderings have brought me some experience, a few trophies and a lot of malaria; and, which I value very much, a Fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society and a Fellowship of the Zoological Society.

CURIOUSLY enough two of my most exciting experiences happened, in Africa, when I was unarmed. In the first case I met a big old lion on a native road at dusk; we met at about 10 feet distance and stared at each other for some seconds before he decided we'd part company. The second incident was when some one upset the Masai. It was just about all Wall Street to a China orange they'd break loose; but a little quiet talk with the Elmoran, as the Masai fighting men are called, quieted things down in their camp. But if I'd taken an armed force with me instead of my native servant only, or if I'd carried anything more deadly than a cane, I fancy they might have put me out.

I always consider that the years I spent with the King's African Rifles were among the happiest of my life.—F. A. M. WEBSTER.

ORIGINAL paintings for *Adventure* covers that have not been already disposed of are for sale to the highest bidders. Any one may bid for as many paintings as he wishes to, but no bid of less than ten dollars per cover will be considered. Send in your bid or bids any time. On July first the paintings will be sent express collect to the highest bidders. It is a good idea to name second or third choices in case some one else outbids you for your favorite painting. Most of the paintings are on canvas, measure about thirty by twenty-one inches and have no lettering on them other than the artist's signed name.—A. S. H.

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These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: All of 1920, except May. Twenty-two numbers. All of 1921 complete, twenty-seven numbers. Covers intact. Ten cents each for complete year's sets.—Address A. C. Bowman, 91 Englewood Ave., Detroit, Mich.

WILL SELL: Most of 1920 and 1921. Some with covers. Also copies of 1918 and 1919 without covers. Ten cents each, postpaid.—Address Edward W. Murphy, 316 West 47th St., New York City.

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Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Assn. of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their inetgrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses for full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1, 2. The Sea. In Two Parts
3. Islands and Coasts
4, 5. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
6. Australia and Tasmania
7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
8. New Guinea
9. Philippine Islands
10. Hawaiian Islands and China
11. Japan
12. Asia, Southern
13—19. Africa. In Seven Parts
20. Turkey and Asia Minor
21. Balkans
22, 23. South America. In Two Parts
24. Central America
25, 26. Mexico and Lower California. In Two Parts
27—33. Canada. In Seven Parts
34. Greenland and Baffinland
35. Alaska
36—39. Western U. S. In Four Parts
40—42. Middle Western U. S. In Three Parts
43—46. Eastern U. S. In Four Parts
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Old Songs That Men Have Sung
Fishing in North America
Mountains and Mountaineering
Standing Information. In Ten Parts

Tanning Recipe

A SIMPLE way of turning the trick:

Question:—"I live in Randolph County, Arkansas. There are rabbits, squirrels, coons, 'possoms and many other "varmints." Will you please send me information on how to make snares and deadfalls and other natural traps; also how to tan hides at home."—HENRY GRIFFING, Imbadia, Arkansas.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—It would require an entire book to describe the snares and deadfalls for all the small fur-bearers. You can get a book on the subject from *Hunter*, *Trader*, *Trapper*, Columbus, Ohio. But if you can make an ordinary figure-4 trap this will help you considerably in the solving of the subject by yourself. I have been over most of your county, as my home is not far

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north from there in Ripley County, Missouri. You should be able to get lots of small fur-bearers, and about the best thing in trapping is not to catch any fur until cold weather sets in.

There are numerous ways for tanning hides, but here is a simple one. Rub well into the hide after you have stretched it equal parts of salt and alum, or put hides down with a layer of it, flesh side to flesh side, for at least a week. After it is all shaken out and dried again work in hog or calf brains, rubbing them in thoroughly. Do this until the hide is perfectly pliable and you will make a nice tanned article. Do not use any of the decoctions advertised. Most of them tan a hide but make them too stiff.

A Letter from the Editor of "Old Songs That Men Have Sung"

LET'S all get together and put this new department over with a whoop. It can readily be made one of the most interesting in the magazine if we get our shoulders behind it. In case you're not acquainted with it yet, you'll find full particulars in the next issue, at the top of this page:

745 Riverside Drive, New York.

Presiding over this Old Songs department is a good deal like running an "old clo'" outfit. Many inquiries are for topical songs of 30 and 40 years ago which enjoyed a brief popularity and passed on and out with that particular brand of theatrical amusement of which they were a part. A line or two is all that most of us remember, and we want the rest. Whoever heard of "Jake Lannigan's Wake," a rollicking bit somewhat like "The Irish Christening"? Or a California gold-seeker's song—a '49er with the refrain:

Cheer up, my lively lads!
In spite of wind or weather—
Cheer up my lively lads!
We'll all dig gold together.

Comrade Alfred Singer of 2830 Coddington Ave., Westchester, N. Y., would like to get his hands on the complete song of which the following is an excerpt; he heard a negro soldier singing it in one of the training-camps in the South during the recent war. As he puts it, "This song doesn't look much on paper; but if you could have heard it sung as I did by a big, husky darky, swinging a pick while he stood up to his knees in mud, I think you'd like the whole thing." Here it is:

Eats when I can get it,
Sleeps 'most all de time.
I don't give a —— if de sun don't never shine.
I kin ride a freight-train;
I don't pay no fare;
I can ride a freight-train almost anywhere.
That's the reason I'm happy as a bee—
I don't bother work
When work don't bother me.

Comrade A. W. Hutchins of 628 North Sixth St., San José, Calif., would like to get on the track of the following songs: "On the Lakes of Pontchartrain," "A Little Mukluk on the Yukon," "Inky Dinky Parley Voo"—the latter sung by our rookies in France during the Great War. If anybody can fix him up, he will be duly grateful; and, incidentally, you might send the news in to us too.

May I impress it upon the minds of our readers that a stamped and addressed envelope should accompany each inquiry? Some of our readers figure the standing notice of this department as an advertisement for the poor wight who runs it. Believe me, most kind and gentle Adventurers, I have no songs to sell—I have simply a bit of information to impart now and then—maybe; and the chances are that, as in the present instance, I'll be looking for more than I have to give.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM.

A Suggestion to Mr. Kocka

BECAUSE personal letters and a general warning in the magazine have been without avail, I'd like to suggest to Jos. M. Kocka, Box 502, Clairton, Pa., that, having persisted in violating the simple rules of this department and having flooded most of its editors with long lists of questions that seem to have no definite purpose other than general information on things in general, he cease to annoy them further. Their time is needed for other readers, who have definite purposes in view, and he displays a poor spirit of comradeship in his exorbitant demands.

New Information on Canadian Lands

OUR thanks to Mr. Lynch for his kindness in bringing our "A. A." information up to date, and for offering to answer inquiries from "A. A." men and others:

Ottawa, Can.

In your questoins and answers department in *Adventure* for February 10, 1922, Mr. Moore answers a question regarding Canadian land, quoting from the Canada Year Book. While at the time the Year Book was published the information was correct, lands within fifteen miles of a railway are no longer reserved for soldier settlement.

This branch of the Canadian Department of the Interior will gladly supply information regarding Canada. We can give you a prompt service in answering inquiries which you may receive and refer to this office.—F. C. C. LYNCH, Superintendent, Natural Resources Intelligence Branch, Department of the Interior.

Where Lions and Leopards Are Vermin

WHAT do they call the fleas on the lions and leopards?

Question:—"My friend and I are contemplating a trip to Africa. We have been to Durban for a brief stay and we rather liked the place, so would be much obliged if you would give us the following information. At present we are trapping and shooting, but the *wanderlust* has again seized us, so we

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must go to fresh fields and pastures new. Here are the questions specified:

What chances are there for employment? We have both had experience on railroads, also in telegraphy.

What kind of fishing is there in the rivers?

What big game is there? Also, is there any restriction on taking firearms into the country?

Have heard that the African Government pays for every animal which is exterminated in the shape of jackals, baboons, red bats, muishands, leopards, tiger, eagles and wild dogs on account of their destruction to crops. Do you think that it would be possible for us to make a livelihood by the destruction of same; that is, assuming that we were paid by the Government so much per head? We have both had some experience in the shape of wild-pig, cattle and deer stalking."—G. F. BIRKETT, Wangaehu, Masterton, New Zealand.

Answer, by Captain Franklin:—As to your obtaining employment, South Africa is still in its infancy and is a land of great opportunity. Your experience in railroading and telegraphy should stand you in good stead as there are over eleven thousand miles of railroads in South Africa, and if you are willing to start in at any job they offer you, I am sure you will very soon get a good position. The wages are good, and the cost of living low.

Fishing. The rivers of Natal are particularly adapted for trout. The rivers have been plentifully stocked with fish imported from the Government hatcheries of the old country and Cape Colony. The fishing throughout Natal is excellent; trout (three varieties), pike, perch and bass are plentiful.

Big game. The following species of big game are found in South Africa: Elephant, eland, zebra, buffalo, bontebok, blesbok, gemsbok, hartebeeste, koodoo, rietbok, klipspringer and springbok. Also partridge, wild duck and geese, snipe, flamingo, antbear and hare. Lions and leopards are not classed as game, but are regarded as vermin. No game may be shot or hunted without a license. Wild ostriches are classed as big game.

There are no restrictions as to taking firearms into the country, but a duty of one pound per barrel is charged.

The Government allows a royalty, in some cases, for destroying vermin, but it would be impossible to make a living in this way.

I am sure you will not make a mistake in going to South Africa. There is work and opportunity there for all, and even if you do not get rich at once you will surely get a wealth of experience. The climate is glorious. It is a great health resort and a sportsman's paradise.

Lures for Coyote, Skunk, Rabbit

BLEST be the name of Biggs, who maketh easy the way of the trapper, and who handeth the pole-cat his own stuff by causing him to fall for a bad smell:

Question:—"I would like to know what is the best way to bait and scent trap to catch coyote, rabbit, weasel and skunk for box and steel traps."—FRANK CONNER, Glendale, Cal.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—To catch coyote: Take 3 traps, No. 3 or No. 4, use iron stakes 18 inches long. Run stakes through chain and drive them clear under ground. Dig out holes for your traps in a triangle. Have traps so that when covered with dirt ¼ inch deep, they are level with ground. Set traps with cotton loosely rolled under each pan. Sprinkle fine dirt over thin paper laid on each trap. Make it look like rest of ground. Chaff around an old stack-bottom makes a good cover, without paper.

Place a dead chicken in center of triangle of traps. Lift upper wing, drive stake through chicken into ground, then drop wing over it. Put a few drops of E. W. Biggs' wolf-bait on the chicken. Take small brush or limb and brush ground lightly all around, to hide tracks.

In visiting traps, don't go any closer than you have to to see if they are sprung or not. E. W. Biggs, Kansas City, Mo., for bait (liquid).

Fifty cents buys a bottle of liquid bait for any kind of fur.

For skunk, weasel or civet cat: When you find sign of either, get a dead chicken, push it back in the hole with a trap at each side and drop on liquid skunk-bait. You will get 'em.

For rabbits: I used the same things for bait that tame rabbits like the best.

Names and addresses of "Ask Adventure" department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do *not* write to the magazine itself.

Earning One's Way

LAST issue we gave you a reprint of the leaflet on "Touring" which Mr. Spears has prepared for general distribution. We also promised you a reprint of his other leaflet, entitled "Earning One's Way." Well, here it is:

ODD-JOBBING for the expense-money of travel is feasible for one not too proud to do any kind of labor. But it is the height of foolishness to expect to graft rides on automobiles, food, or shelter. The automobos have overdone their tripping at other people's expense, and this type of nuisance has degenerated into mere tramps.

Work to be had includes road-building, all kinds of farming-labor, from planting to harvest; repair-work, etc.; sawmills, logging jobs, ditching, levee-work, and all kinds of lifting, lugging and heaving tasks. The itinerant stranger, however, would better not try to break in on union-labor jobs unless he has his card.

Mechanics of general skill can turn their hands to such work as automobile cleaning, repairing, tightening, greasing, etc., especially in farming and other back-country regions. A skilled garage man, for example, could probably find odd jobs and permanent work almost anywhere. Useful automobile accessories find ready sale; and installing vaporizers, hot-spots, and other gasoline-savers of indisputable value is worth while; but itinerant frauds have burst prospects for legitimate work.

The problem isn't how much a traveler can earn, but whether he can earn anything or not. Unless

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one makes sport of hard work, poorly paid, he has no place on the road. I've been rafter, roustabout —seventeen of us, one white—logger, ditcher, hemlock-bark chuter, cattle-driver, corn-pitcher, woodcutter, errand-boy, etc., to help pay expenses of travel. A banjo, French harp (mouth organ), and other music goes far in adding to the pleasure of those one meets.

It is foolish to expect to live on game, fur or fish that one catches. It takes years to become an expert hunter, trapper or fisherman; and State laws menace all nonresidents who seek to kill what belongs to everybody; for game is now more valuable, generally speaking, alive than dead—and the public knows it at last. No greenhorn can make his living catching things that know more about keeping alive than he does about killing them.

It costs from twenty cents to a dollar a day for food. If one cooks his own food, buying simplest meats, grains, vegetables, with some fruit—one must eat some fruit daily to keep in good health—probably forty cents a day will feed one anywhere. One eats from two to four pounds of food a day on the road—potatoes, flour, cornmeal, meat, etc.—and food always costs either money or work. Bought cooked meals will cost hardly less than a dollar a day, average.

No one gets his living for nothing. Work, or its equivalent in money, must be paid. Those who mooch, or beg, their way lose in self-respect more than honest payment would cost in effort. It is better to saw wood, mow a lawn, or wash an automobile than to take a handout for nothing, merely to escape the shame of begging something for nothing. There is no pleasure in evading or slacking in the face of the world's demand for honest toil.

A bookkeeper, stenographer and office-worker will find in thousands of towns garages, stores, and other enterprises where business people need help in posting up books, catching up with correspondence, etc. A good typewriter in one's outfit can earn good money. Expert work of all kinds is in demand. Farmers, itinerant sawmills, threshing-outfits, and all kinds of contractors, outside businesses, must keep income-tax acounts; and I have myself been asked to do various types of account-keeping merely because I had a typewriter; and a fountain pen once kept me busy writing letters for illiterate mountain people.

No one should start off just to see the sights. Some definite purpose of learning certain work, seeing certain definite regions or localities, and for a limited period of time, should be in mind. Don't quit; but don't degenerate into a mere tramp.

For the youth anxious to travel, I suggest that the search be for work to do for life. Examine the desires for the hope of honest accomplishment, and then go where this thing can best be done—and do it. Forestry, mining, electrical developments, hydraulic engineering—all kinds of engineering, all kinds of farming, fruit-raising, livestock-growing, road-building, and countless honest and profitable occupations, can be studied in all climates, under all kinds of conditions. Earn a living in any honest way; but make a specialty of the planned life work—real work, not having fun trapping, say—and learn all there is to know about it.

Free service, but we don't pay the postage to get it to you.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

The Wonder Cave Maraa

I CAN'T help thinking that there must be a catch in this somewhere:

Question:—"I am enclosing a clipping from the *Arkansas Gazette* which has aroused my curiosity.

How large is this pool?

Does there really seem to be some supernatural force at work, or is the size of the place the cause?

The article says the reason has never been explained satisfactorily; but has it?

Any other information you can give me on the subject will be appreciated.

If this is published please do not print my name."
— —— ——, Little Rock, Ark.

The clipping which the correspondent encloses is:

DEAD WIZARD RULES CAVE
Renders Throwing Stone Across Cavern Impossible, Natives Believe.

Papeete, Tahiti (Society Islands).—About twenty-seven kilometers from Papeete—at the beginning of the district of Papara on Tahiti—is a cave called the Cave of Maraa. It is a large opening in the side of the mountain; its floor a pool of clear, icy-cold water. There is nothing remarkable about it in appearance.

Its interest lies in its being the reputed burial place of a powerful wizard of old, the spell of whose enchantments still broods over the cavern. The particular manifestation which interests passers-by is the impossibility of striking the opposite wall of the cave with a stone, although to the eye the feat seems the easiest of undertakings. Most newcomers laugh at the legend and start out with an easy throw, only to see the missile drop in the water apparently but a few feet away.

Then they warm to the work and exert all the force that is in them, and, at last making slings, strive with all their might to overcome the power of the old warlock; but to no avail. The stones drop ignominiously in the water as if some unseen hand had caught them in midair and cast them down in the center of the cavern. The reason has never been explained satisfactorily.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—I have read with considerable interest the clipping on the Cave of Maraa. For many times have I stood within and exerted myself by attempting to throw stones across to the opposite wall of its pool, which, by the way, is about twenty-five or thirty feet wide and again as long.

I can not explain the thing at all. I have tried about every method I could think up for sending a stone across that pool, but always some unseen hand, so it did seem, reached up and caught my stones in midair. After that they dropped into the pool, as if old Maraa was laughing at me. This thing can not be explained—just as no one can explain how the firewalkers of Tahiti manage to tread barefooted over white-hot stones without getting burned.

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Tierra del Fuego

A GOOD place to sail past:

Question:—"Would like a little information on the Tierra del Fuego Islands. Myself and two more partners would like to do a little trapping or prospecting in those parts. I am enclosing an addressed envelop and stamp. The questions follow below.

What part would you advise us to go to?

What class of people are at this part?

Could I get a job there if I was broke?

Are there any Americans at this part?

How is the climate all year round?

What is the fare from New York (second or third class)?

What kind of minerals are found there?

Is there any trapping? If so what kind of animals are found there?

I have a .45 automatic and a .32 caliber revolver and my partners have a .38 caliber. Would you advise us to take them along?

How much is an American dollar worth there?

Has any prospecting ever been done there?

If a fellow did not do any prospecting or trapping do you think he could make a living down there?

Is there any farming there?"—JOSEPH KRIST, Chelsea, Mass.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—Many of your queries may be lumped together. Tierra del Fuego is not the sort of place I'd pick out for exploitation myself. I believe there are about five hundred whites there in over 20,000 square miles, and so far as I know there is but one indifferent sort of settlement, Ushuaia, the so-called capital of the portion owned by Argentina.

Except for some sheep-raising and a trifling amount of gold along the Beagle Channel I know of nothing a man could do if busted. A dollar is worth just that and no more; so far as the natives, Yahgans and Onas, are concerned, they'd immensely prefer a pot-metal hatchet or a tenpenny nail to a wad of currency.

There are few animals—none except rats and a few hares to the best of my recollection—and really I can not imagine what you want to pick on that barren, bleak, dismal spot for.

You would find the arms you mention all right, though the sight of them is enough. If you can't show them, however, you're likely to be bothered by some of the natives, who are about the lowest-grade humans I know outside the real Australian blackfellow.

You might find work sheep-herding, or you might find gold enough to pay grub bills, but at neither job are you likely to make a staggering fortune.

Ask a good bookseller to get for you "Aconcagua and Tierra del Fuego" by Sir M. Conway if you're still determined to tackle the locations; but, oh, man! Ain't there no brighter spots left on this yer ol' airth than that?

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

ROY, JOHN or PRUITT, WM. Lived near Dexter, Kansas, seventeen or eighteen years ago. Please let me hear from you.—Address ATTY. LILARD JOHNSON, 307 South Cherry St., San Antonio, Texas.

BOB. Brother. Everything O. K. To your advantage to write to West Hurley, Bess needs you.—CORINNE.

NICHOLS, FRANK. Last heard of in Reno, Nevada. Father is dead. Write to mother.—Address OSCAR NICHOLS, 40 Stirling St., Newark, N. J.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. ¶ In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

"DUBS" write to "WIS" Care of *Adventure.*

PELLEY, WM. G. A. Father. Last heard from in St. Louis and Kansas City. Left Springfield, Mass., 1913. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated. Write me, everything confidential.—Address MRS. PAUL H. PHILLIPS, 183 Commonwealth Ave., Springfield, Mass.

ANY ONE who saw the accident to the Harry Wright Amusement Co. Boat, *Marion* a few miles below Helena, Ark., on the Mississippi River April 26, 1908, please write to GEORGE R. GREGORY, Hospital National Soldiers Home, Danville, Ill.

LEVINE. Brother. Left the Old Country for England, and has not been heard from in forty years. His father's name was Berel, mother name, Chipe, brother, Shmooalabe—and a sister, Vivi Gitel. Any information will be appreciated by his brother—Address PINKUS LEVINE, 25 Old Colony Square, Brockton, Mass.

CROSS, VERDE. Last heard from in Ely, Nevada, in August, 1920. Father died August, 1921. Mother living alone and lonely. Please write to mother.—Address MRS. A. E. CROSS, 3550 Sophia St., Vancouver, B. C.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

COHEN, ALF E. Formerly of Seattle, Wash. Last heard of owned a delicatessen store in Portland, Oregon, about 1915. Any information will be appreciated.—Address K. E. ROCKWELL, 4234 Rainier Ave., Seattle, Wash.

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MOORE, BILL. Had three brothers, Dave, John and James Henderson. Last heard from somewhere in western Texas. Any information of his whereabouts, or the whereabouts of his relations will be appreciated.—Address J. M. MOORE, care of *Adventure*.

KAVANAGH, JOHN. Age forty-three, Cigar-maker. Last seen at Kamloops, B. C., 1903. Intended going to Seattle, Wash. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to his sister.—Address RITA SCANLAN, 40 St. George St., Toronto, Ont., Canada.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BREFFIN, JAGO. (JAMES YOUNG). Formerly Headquarters, 2nd Batt. 15th Infantry, Camp Darago, Albay, P. I. Your old chum of H. Co. has information of value for you.—Address HARRY HOLDSWORTH, 1773 West 37th Street, Los Angeles, Cal.

CARLEY, M. R. Of Benton Harbor, Michigan. Was carpenter's mate in Navy, at Great Lakes, Ill. Was sick in Main Hospital Camp, unit 12, in Winter of 1918 and 1919. Your old shipmate "Salty Steve" wants to hear from you.—Address W. T. STEPHENSON, 1002 Lapeer Ave., Port Huron, Mich.

BLUM, ALBERT. (SHORTY.) Have been in California two months, and have written you several places. Will be here for some time, so write me.—Address HOWARD LLEWELLYN, Box 411, Atascadero, Cal.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

WHITLATCH, JAMES MONROE. Father. Last heard from in Bellaire, Ohio. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address MRS. A. CLENDENIN, 116 7th Street, Parkersburg, W. Va.

CAWLEY, CHARLES. Last address known care of Drawer R. Lost track of Larsen too. Write soon.—J. V. WELLS, care of H. Gaskill, Apt. 12, 725 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, Md.

THE following have been inquired for in either the March 30th or April 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

ALFORD, JIMMIE LEE; Black, John Jackson; Blomstergren, O. V.; Bobonie, George; Brown, Geo. C.; Bensinger, Alf; Dates, Alfred Thomas; Dickman, Sgt.; Fallon, Frank; Hannigan, Pat; Harries, (or Harris) Hugh M.; Harrison, Lee; Hintz, Harry; Hodges, Sebastian; Hurley, James; Jenkins, Chas. Westley; Lane, Edward; Le Effe, Jack; Lockwood, Robert L.; Mahoney, Arthur; McCulloch, Milan E.; McFarland, Edward; Menard, Patrick; Owne, Jack; Parmeter, John; Reeves, John R. Rucker, Lulu Williams; Seelye, Lawrence Copeland; Shepard, Harold North; Simonsen, Stanley L.; Smart, William R.; Wagner, Henry A.; Ward, Walter G.; Weathers, Christena; Wilson, Anna, Margaret and Edward; Wolff, Albert; Wood, Marion; Wright, Cecil.

MISCELLANEOUS—Any of the old gang who were in Co. A. 40th Inf. from July, 1917, to January 18th, 1919; Co. K. 11th Inf. U. S. A.; Hefley, Linneman, Friday, Hardy, Rainbolt, McClellan, Creighton or any of the gang that rode the No. 7 and No. 11 cars in 1918 and 1919. Relatives of Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Wilkey; Descendants of Michael E. McCaffrey; Descendants of John Walsh; Gang who served in the Ambulance Co. No. 8 Corozal, Canal Zone 1915 to 1921; Members of Coast Guard Cutter *Apache* or *Yamacraw* who served during 1919, also members of crew of the Shipping Board Steamer *Collingsworth*, who were aboard at time of salvaging of the S. S. *West Waoneke:* Rickle.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

APRIL 30TH ISSUE

Besides the three complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

TOO MUCH PROGRESS FOR PIPEROCK — *W. C. Tuttle*
Cowboys and "culchaw."

THE FIGHT FOR THE CAVE — *Prosper Buranelli*
Men of 20,000 years ago.

KOS, THE WITCH-DOCTOR — *Santie Sabalala*
Intrigue in Kaffir kraals.

THE WARRIORS OF THE PECOS — *Frederick R. Bechdolt*
When all men were gunmen.

THE BUTTERFLY HUNTER — *Frederick Moore*
In a net of savages.

WRECKER MALLOW An Off-the-Trail Story — *Kenneth Howell*
A South Seas trader—and the bonds of friendship.

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YPOCRITES! PANDERERS! ROBBERS F INNOCENTS! FOR SHAME! Cried Brann

o one escaped his withering, scorching blast. press, the pulpit, the rich, the titled, the poor, mighty—all were seared by his lightning-flashes of rhetoric. Wherever and whenever nn, the Iconoclast, found rottenness, or fakes, frauds, there he unloosened the thunderbolts of fury. Society was shocked at his merciless osures. The guilty, branded with their in-ny, hung their heads in dishonor. They cried out to stop him—they invoked the powers of earth to silence him. Alone he defied the world. Was he master of the passions of men that he could craze with hatred and hypnotize with love? What was this strange magic that held hundreds of thousands spellbound? Why did one man give his own life to take the life of Brann, the Iconoclast?

BRANN, *the* Iconoclast

e tore off the sham draperies of Virtue—snatched away the purple cloak of ypocrisy—threw aside the mock mantle of Modesty—laid bare the blinding akedness of Truth. With the fury of an avenging angel he hurled himself on every fake and fraud of Christendom. With a boldness that outraged con-ention, struck terror to the hearts of the timid, blasted the lives of the guilty, he evealed the shame of the world.

BRANN, The Iconoclast

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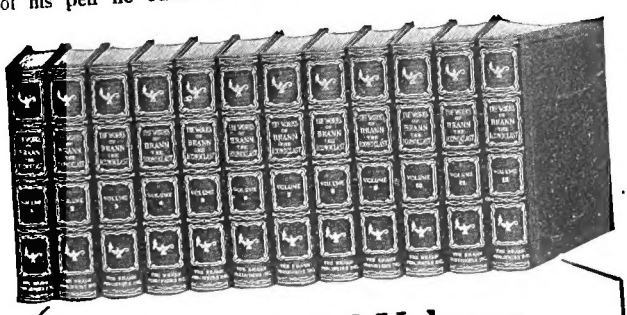
No influence was strong enough to encompass Brann's downfall. For he wielded the power of words. He wove a pattern of words, and it breathed with life, shone with beauty, scintillated with satire. At his touch cold type kindled into fire, glowed with the red heat of wrath, blinded with the white flare of passion. With the genius of his pen he ruled the emotions of men, played upon the heartstrings of humanity. Under his inspiration his pen became an instrument of destruction that wrought the crashing havoc of a cyclone—again it became as a scourge of scorpions that flayed into the raw—or again it was a gleaming rapier that pierced swiftly, cleanly, fatally. And now you may have this beautiful twelve-volume set for five days' free examination. If, at the end of that time, you decide that you do not want to keep the set, you are at liberty to return it and the trial will not have cost you a cent. If you keep the set, as you doubtless will, pay for it on the amazingly easy terms shown on the coupon.



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